FELIX O'DAY

· F · HOPKINSON · SMITH ·

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BY

F. HOPKINSON SMITH

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FELIX O'DAY

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CHAPTER I

Broadway on dry nights, or rather that part known as the Great White Way, is a crowded thoroughfare, dominated by lofty buildings, the sky-line studded with constellations of colored signs pencilled in fire. Broadway on wet, rain-drenched nights is the fairy concourse of the Wonder City of the World, its asphalt splashed with liquid jewels afloat in molten gold.

Across this flood of frenzied brilliance surge hurrying mobs, dodging the ceaseless traffic, trampling underfoot the wealth of the Indies, striding through pools of quicksilver, leaping gutters filled to the brim with melted rubies—horse, car, and man so many black silhouettes against a tremulous sea of light.

Along this blinding whirl blaze the playhouses, their wide portals aflame with crackling globes, toward which swarm bevies of pleasure-seeking moths, their eyes dazzled by the glare. Some with heads and throats bare dart from costly broughams, the mountings of their sleek, rain-varnished horses glittering in the flash of the electric lamps. Others spring from out street cabs. Many come by twos and threes, their skirts

held high. Still others form a line, its head lost in a small side door. These are in drab and brown, with worsted shawls tightly drawn across thin shoulders. Here, too, wedged in between shabby men, the collars of their coats muffling their chins, their backs to the grim policeman, stand keen-eyed newsboys and ragged street urchins, the price of a gallery seat in their tightly closed fists.

Soon the swash and flow of light flooding the street and sidewalks shines the clearer. Fewer dots and lumps of man, cab, and cart now cross its surface. The crowd has begun to thin out. The doors of the theatres are deserted; some flaunt signs of "Standing Room Only." The cars still follow their routes, lunging and pausing like huge beetles; but much of the wheel traffic has melted, with only here and there a cab or truck between which gold-splashed umbrellas pick a hazardous way.

With the breaking of the silent dawn, shadowed in a lonely archway or on an abandoned doorstep the wet, bedraggled body of a hapless moth is sometimes found, her iridescent wings flattened in the mud. Then for a brief moment a cry of protest, or scorn, or pity goes up. The passers-by raise their hands in anger, draw their skirts aside in horror, or kneel in tenderness. It is the same the world over, and New York is no better and, for that matter, no worse.

On one of these rain-drenched nights, some ten years or more ago, when the streets were flooded with

He had kept his place since the doors were opened, his keen eye searching every face that passed

jewels, and the sky-line aflame, a man in a slouch hat, a wet mackintosh clinging to his broad shoulders, stood close to the entrance of one of the principal playhouses along this Great White Way. He had kept his place since the doors were opened, his hat-brim pulled over his brow, his keen eye searching every face that passed. To all appearances he was but an idle looker-on, attracted by the beauty of the women, and yet during all that time he had not moved, nor had he been in the way, nor had he been observed even by the door man, the flap of the awning casting its shadow about him. Only once had he strained forward, gazing intently, then again relaxed, settling into his old position.

Not until the last couple had hurried by, breathless at being late, did he refasten the top button of his mackintosh, move clear of the nook which had sheltered him, and step out into the open.

For an instant he glanced about him, seemed to hesitate, as does a bit of driftwood blocked in the current; then, with a sudden straightening of his shoulders, he wheeled and threaded his way down-town.

At Herald Square, he mounted with an aimless air a flight of low steps, peered through the windows, and listened to the crunch of the presses chewing the cud of the day's news. When others crowded close he stepped back to the sidewalk, raising his hat once in apology to an elderly dame who, with head down, had brushed him with her umbrella.

By the time he reached 30th Street his steps had be-

come slower. Again he hesitated, and again with an aimless air turned to the left, the rain still pelting his broad shoulders, his hat pulled closer to protect his face. No lights or color pursued him here. The fronts of the houses were shrouded in gloom; only a hall lantern now and then and the flare of the lamps at the crossings, he alone and buffeting the storm—all others behind closed doors. When Fourth Avenue was reached he lifted his head for the first time. A lighted window had attracted his attention—a wide, corner window filled with battered furniture, ill-assorted china, and dented brass—one of those popular morgues that house the remains of decayed respectability.

Pausing automatically, he glanced carelessly at the contents, and was about to resume his way when he caught sight of a small card propped against a broken pitcher. "Choice Articles Bought and Sold—Advances Made."

Suddenly he stopped. Something seemed to interest him. To make sure that he had read the card aright, he bent closer. Evidently satisfied by his scrutiny, he drew himself erect and moved toward the shop door as if to enter. Through the glass he saw a man in shirt-sleeves, packing. The sight of the man brought another change of mind, for he stepped back and raised his head to a big sign over the front. His face now came into view, with its well-modelled nose and square chin—the features of a gentleman of both refinement and intelligence. A man of forty—perhaps of forty-five—

clean-shaven, a touch of gray about his temples, his eyes shadowed by heavy brows from beneath which now and then came a flash as brief and brilliant as an electric spark. He might have been a civil engineer, or some scientist, or yet an officer on half pay.

"Otto Kling, 445 Fourth Avenue," he repeated to himself, to make sure of the name and location. Then, with the quick movement of a man suddenly imbued with new purpose, he wheeled, leaped the overflowed gutter, and walked rapidly until he reached 13th Street. Half-way down the block he entered the shabby doorway of an old-fashioned house, mounted to the third floor, stepped into a small, poorly furnished bedroom lighted by a single gas-jet, and closed the door behind him. Lifting his wet hat from his well-rounded head, with its smoothly brushed, closely trimmed hair—a head that would have looked well in bronze—he raised the edge of the bedclothes and from underneath the narrow cot dragged out a flat, sole-leather trunk of English make. This he unlocked with a key fastened to a steel chain, took out the tray, felt about among the contents, and drew out a morocco-covered dressing-case, of good size and of evident value, bearing on its top a silver plate inscribed with a monogram and crest. The trunk was then relocked and shoved under the bed.

At this moment a knock startled him.

"Come in," he called, covering the case with a corner of the cotton quilt.

A bareheaded, coarse-featured woman with a black shawl about her shoulders stood in the doorway. "I've

come for my money," she burst out, too angry for preliminaries. "I'm gittin' tired of bein' put off. You're two weeks behind."

"Only two weeks? I was afraid it was worse, my dear madame," he answered calmly, a faint smile curling his thin lips. "You have a better head for figures than I. But do not concern yourself. I will pay you in the morning."

"I've heard that before, and I'm gittin' sick of it. You'd 'a' been out of here last week if my husband hadn't been laid up with a lame foot."

"I am sorry to hear about the foot. That must be even worse than my being behind with your rent."

"Well, it's bad enough with all I got to put up with. Of course I don't want to be ugly," she went on, her fierceness dying out as she noticed his unruffled calm, "but these rooms is about all we've got, and we can't afford to take no chances."

"Did you suppose I would let you?"

"Let me what?"

"Let you take chances. When I become convinced that I cannot pay you what I owe you, I will give you notice in advance. I should be much more unhappy over owing you such a debt than you could possibly be in not getting your money."

The answer, so unlike those to which she had been accustomed from other delinquents, suddenly rekindled her anger. "Will some of them friends of yours that never show up bring you the money?" she snapped back.

"Have you met any of them on the stairs?" he inquired blandly.

"No, nor nowhere else. You been here now goin' on three months, and there ain't come a letter, nor nothin' by express, and no man, woman, or child has asked for you. Kinder queer, don't you think?"

"Yes, I do think so; and I can hardly blame you. It *is* suspicious—*very* suspicious—alarmingly so," he rejoined with an indulgent smile. Then growing grave again: "That will do, madame. I will send for you when I am ready. Do not lose any sleep and do not let your husband lose any. I will shut the door myself."

When the clatter of her rough shoes had ceased to echo on the stairs he drew the dressing-case from its hiding-place, tucked it inside his mackintosh, turned down the gas-jet, locked the door of the room, retracing his steps until he stood once more in front of Kling's sign. This time he went in.

"I am glad you are still open," he began, shaking the wet from his coat. "I hoped you would be. You are Mr. Kling, are you not?"

"Yes, dot is my name. Vot can I do for you?"

"I passed by your window a short time ago, and saw your card, stating that advances were made on choice articles. Would this be of any use to you?" He took the dressing-case from under his coat and handed it to Kling. "I am not ready to sell it—not to sell it outright; you might, perhaps, make me a small loan which would answer my purpose. Its value is about

sixty pounds—some three hundred dollars of your money. At least, it cost that. It is one of Vickery's, of London, and it is almost new."

Kling glanced sharply at the intruder. "I don't keep open often so late like dis. You must come in de morning."

"Cannot you look at it now?"

Something in the stranger's manner appealed to the dealer. He lowered his chin, adjusted his spectacles, and peered over their round silver rims—a way with him when he was making up his mind.

"Vell, I don't mind. Let me see," and opening the case he took out the silver-topped bottles, placing them in a row on the counter behind which he stood. "Yes, dot's a good vun," he continued with a grunt of approval. "Yes—dot's London, sure enough. Yes, I see Vickery's name—whose initials is on dese bottles? And de arms—de lion and de vings on him—dot come from somebody high up, ain't it? Vhere did you get 'em?"

"That is of no moment. What I want to know is, will you either pay me a fair price for it or loan me a fair sum on it?"

"Is it yours to sell?"

"It is." There was no trace of resentment in his voice, nor did he show the slightest irritation at being asked so pointed a question.

"Vell, I don't keep a pawn-shop. I got no license, and if I had I vouldn't do it—too much trouble all de time. Poor vomans, dead-beats, suckers, sneak-thieves

—all kind of peoples you don't vant, to come in the door vhen you have a pawn-shop."

"Your sign said advances made."

"Vich vun?"

"The one in the window, or I would not have troubled you."

"Vell, dot means anyting you please. Sometimes I get olt granfadder vatches dot vay, and olt Sheffield plate and tings vich olt families sell vhen everybody is gone dead. Vy do you vant to give dis away? I vouldn't, if I vas you. You don't look like a man vot is broke. I vill put back de bottles. You take it home agin."

"I would if I had any home to take it to. I am a stranger here and am two weeks behind in the rent of my room."

"Is dot so? Vell, dot is too bad. Two weeks behint and no home but a room! I vouldn't think dot to look at you."

"I would not either if I had the courage to look at myself in the glass. Then you cannot help me?"

"I don't say dot I can't. Somebody may come in. I have lots of tings belong to peoples, and ven other peoples come in, sometimes dey buy, and sometimes dey don't. Sometimes only one day goes by, and sometimes a whole year. You leave it vid me. I take care of it. Den I get my little Masie—dat little girl of mine vot I call Beesvings—to polish up all de bottles and make everyting look like new."

"Then I will come in the morning?"

"Yes, but give me your name—someting might happen yet, and your address. Here, write it on dis card."

"No, that is unnecessary. I will take your word for it."

"But vere can I find you?"

"I will find myself, thank you," and he strode out into the rain.

CHAPTER II

In the days when Otto Kling's shop-windows attracted collectors in search of curios and battered furniture, "The Avenue," as its denizens always called Fourth Avenue between Madison Square Garden and the tunnel, was a little city in itself.

Almost all the needs of a greater one could be supplied by the stores fronting its sidewalks. If tea, coffee, sugar, and similar stimulating and soothing groceries were wanted, old Bundleton, on the corner above Kling's, in a white apron and paper cuffs, weighed them out. If it were butter or eggs, milk, cream, or curds, the Long Island Dairy—which was really old man Heffern, his daughter Mary, and his boy Tom—had them in a paper bag, or on your plate, or into your pitcher before you could count your change. If it were a sirloin, or lamb-chops, or Philadelphia chickens, or a Cincinnati ham, fat Porterfield, watched over from her desk by fat Mrs. Porterfield, dumped them on a pair of glittering brass scales and sent them home to your kitchen invitingly laid out in a flat wicker basket. If it were fish—fresh, salt, smoked, or otherwise—to say nothing of crabs, oysters, clams, and the exclusive and expensive lobster—it was Codman, a few doors above Porterfield's, who had them on ice, or in barrels, the

varnished claws of the lobsters thrust out like the hands of a drowning man.

Were it a question of drugs, there was Pestler, the apothecary, with his four big green globes illuminated by four big gas-jets, the joy of the children. A small fellow this Pestler, with a round head and up-brushed hair set on a long, thin stem of a neck, the whole growing out of a pair of narrow shoulders, quite like a tulip from a glass jar.

And then there were Jarvis, the spectacle man, and that canny Scotchman Sanderson, the florist, who knew the difference between roses a week old and roses a day old, and who had the rare gift of so mixing the two vintages that hardly enough dead stock was left over for funerals including those presided over by his fellow conspirator Digwell, the undertaker, who lived over his mausoleum of a back room.

And, of course, there were the bakeshop emitting enticing smells, mostly of currants and burnt sugar, and the hardware store, full of nails and pocket-knives, and old Mr. Jacobs, the tailor, who sat cross-legged on a wide table in a room down four stone steps from the sidewalk, and the grog-shops—more's the pity—one on every corner save Kling's.

Hardly a trace is now left of any one of them, so sudden and overwhelming has been the march of modern progress. Even the little Peter Cooper House, picked up bodily by that worthy philanthropist and set down here nearly a hundred years ago, is gone, and so are the row of musty, red-bricked houses at the

lower end of this Little City in Itself. And so are the tenants of this musty old row, shady locksmiths with a tendency toward skeleton keys; ingenious upholsterers who indulged in paper-hanging on the sly; shoemakers who did half-soling and heeling, their day's work set to dry on the window-sill, not to mention those addicted to the use of the piano, banjo, or harp, as well as the wig and dress makers who lightened the general gloom.

And with the disappearance of these old landmarks—and it all took place within less than ten years—there disappeared, also, the old family life of "The Avenue," in which each home shared in the good-fellowship of the whole, all of them contributing to that sane and sustaining stratum, if we did but know it, of our civic structure—facts that but few New Yorkers either recognize or value.

On the block below Kling's in those other days was the quaint Book Shop owned by Tim Kelsey, the hunchback, a walking encyclopædia of knowledge, much of it as musty and out of date as most of his books; while overtopping all else in importance, so far as this story is concerned, was the shabby, old-fashioned two-story house known the town over as the Express Office of John and Kitty Cleary, sporting above its narrow street-door a swinging sign informing inquirers that trunks were carried for twenty-five cents.

And not only trunks, but all of the movable furniture up and down the avenue, and most of that from the

adjacent regions, found their way in and out of the Cleary wagons. Indeed Otto Kling's confidence in Kitty—and Kitty was really the head of the concern —was so great that he always refused to allow any of her rivals to carry his purchases and sales, even at a reduced price, a temptation seldom resisted by the economical Dutchman.

Nor did the friendly relations end here. Not only did Kitty's man Mike hammer up at night the rusty iron shutters protecting Kling's side window, clean away the snow before his store, and lend a hand in the moving of extra-heavy pieces, but he was even known to wash the windows and kindle a fire.

That Mike had delayed or entirely forgotten to hammer up these same iron shutters when the stranger brought in the dressing-case accounted for the fact of Otto Kling's shop having been kept open until so late. It also accounted for the fact that when the same stranger appeared early the next morning (Mike was tending the store) and made his way to where the Irishman sat he found him conning the head-lines of the morning paper. That worthy man-of-all-work, never having laid eyes on him before, at once made a mental note of the intruder's well-cut English clothes, heavy walking-shoes, and short brier-wood pipe, and, concluding therefrom that he was a person of importance, stretched out his hand toward the bell-rope in connection with the breakfast-room above, at the same time saying with great urbanity: "Take a chair, or, if yer cold, come up near the stove. Mr. Kling will be down

in a minute. He's up-stairs eatin' his breakfast with his little girl. I'm not his man or I'd wait on ye meself. A little fresh, ain't it, after the wet night we had?"

"I left a dressing-case here last night," ventured the intruder.

Mike's chin went out with a quick movement, his face expressive of supreme disgust at his mistake. "Oh, is it that? Somethin' ye had to sell? Well, then, maybe you'd better call durin' the day."

"No, I will wait—you need not ring. I have nothing else to do, and Mr. Kling may have a great deal. I take it you are from the north of Ireland, either Londonderry or near there. Am I right?"

"I'm from Lifford, within reach of it. How the divil did ye know?"

"I can tell from your brogue. How long have you been in this country?"

"About five years—going on six now. How long have you been here?"

"How long? Well—" Here he bent over the table against which he had been leaning, selected a cup from a group of china, turned it upside down in search of the mark, and then, as if he had momentarily forgotten himself, answered slowly: "Oh, not long—a few months or so. You do not object to my looking these over?" he asked, this time reversing a plate and subjecting it to the same scrutiny.

"No, so ye don't let go of 'em. Fellow come in here last week and broke a teapot foolin' wid it."

The visitor, without replying, continued his cool

examination of the collection, consisting of articles of different makes and colors. Presently, gathering up a pair of cups and saucers, he said: "These should be in a glass case or in the safe. They are old Spode and very rare. Ah, here is Mr. Kling! I have amused myself, sir, in looking over part of your stock. You seem to have undervalued these cups and saucers. They are very rare, and if you had a full set of them they would be almost priceless. This is old Spode," he continued, pointing to the cipher on the bottom of each cup.

"Vell, I didn't tink dot ven I bought it."

There was no greeting, no reference to their having met before. One might have supposed that their last talk had been uninterrupted.

"It vas all in a lump, and der vas a soup tureen in de lot—I don't know vot I did vid it. I tink dat's up-stairs. Mike, you go up and ask my little girl Masie if she can find dot big tureen vich I bought from old Mrs. Blobbs who keeps dot old-clothes place on Second Avenue. And you vas sure about dis china?"

"Very sure."

"How do you know?"

"From the mark.

"Vot's it vorth?"

"The cups and saucers would bring about two pounds apiece in London. If there were a full dozen they would bring a matter of fifteen or twenty pounds—some hundred dollars of your money."

Kling stepped nearer and peered intently at the stranger. "You give dot for dem?"

The man's eyebrows narrowed. "I am not buying cups at present," he answered, with quiet dignity, "but they are worth what I tell you."

"And now tell me vot dis tureen is vorth?" he asked as Mike reappeared and set it on the table, backing away with the remark that he'd go now, Mrs. Cleary would be wantin' him. Kling moved the relic toward the expert for closer examination.

"Don't trouble yourself, Mr. Kling; I can see it. All I can say is that the old lady must have known better days and must have been terribly poor to have parted with it. What, if I may ask, did you pay her for this?"

"Two dollars. Vas it too much?" The stranger had suddenly become an important personage.

"No—too little. It is old Lowestoft, and"—here he took the lid from the dealer's hand—"yes, without a crack or blemish—yes, old Lowestoft—worth, I should say, ten or more pounds. They are giving large sums for these things in London. Perhaps you have not made a specialty of china."

Otto had now forgotten the tureen and was scrutinizing the speaker, wondering what kind of a man he really was—this fellow who looked and spoke like a person of position, knew the value of curios at sight, and yet who had confessed the night before to being behind with his rent and anxious to sell his belongings to keep off the street. Then the doubt, universal in

the minds of second-hand dealers, arose. "Come along vid me and tell me some more. Vot is dot chair?" and he drew out a freshly varnished relic of better days.

The man seized the chair by the back, canted it to see all sides of it, and was about to give his decision when the laughter of a child and the sharp, quick bark of a dog caused him to pause and raise his head. A white fox-terrier with a clothes-pin tail, two scissored ears, and two restless, shoe-button eyes, peering through button-hole lids, followed by a little girl ten or twelve years of age, was regarding him suspiciously.

"He won't hurt you," cried the child. "Come back, you naughty Fudge!"

"I do not intend he shall," said the man, reaching down and picking the dog up bodily by the scruff of his neck. "What is the matter, old fellow?" he continued, twisting the dog's head so that he could look into his eyes. "Wanted to make a meal of me?—too bad. Your little daughter, of course, Mr. Kling? A very good breed of dog, my dear young lady—just a little nervous, and that is in his favor. Now, sir, make your excuses to your mistress," and he placed the terrier in her arms.

The child lifted her face toward his in delight. Most of the men whom Fudge attacked either shrunk out of his way or replied to his attentions with a kick.

"You love dogs, don't you, sir?" she asked. Fudge was now routing his sharp nose under her chin as if in apology for his antics.

"I am afraid I do, and I am glad you do—they are sometimes the best friends one has."

"Yes," broke in Kling, "and so am I glad. Dot dog is more as a brudder to my Masie, ain't he, Beesvings? And now you run avay, dear, and play, and take Fudge vid you and say 'Good morning' to Mrs. Cleary, and maybe dot fool dog of Bobby's be home." He stooped and kissed her, caressing her cheek with his thumb and forefinger, as he pushed her toward the door, and again turned to the stranger. "And now, vot about dot chair you got in your hand?"

"Oh, the chair! I had forgotten that you had asked. Your little daughter drove everything else out of my head. Let me have a closer look." He swung it round to get a nearer view.

"The legs—that is, three of them—are Chippendale. The back is a nondescript of something—I cannot tell. Perhaps from some colonial remnant."

"Vot's it vorth?"

"Nothing, except to sit upon."

Otto laughed—a gurgling, chuckling laugh, his pudgy nose wrinkling like a rabbit's.

"Ain't dot funny!" and he rubbed his fat hands. "Dot's true. Yes, I make it myselluf—and five oders, vich vas sold out of a lot of olt furniture. I got two German men down-stairs puttin' in new legs and new backs; dey can do anyting. Nobody but you find dot out. I guess you know 'bout dot china—I must look into dot. Maybe some mens on Fifth Avenue buy dot china—dey never come in here because dey tink

dey find only olt furniture. And now about dot dressing-case. Don't you sell it. I find somebody pay more as I can give, and you pay me for my trouble. I lend you tventy—yes, I lend tventy-five dollars on it. Vill dot be enough?"

"That will be enough for a week, after I pay what I owe."

"Vell, den, ven dot is gone ve tink out someting else, don't ve? I look it all over last night. It is all right—no breaks anyvere. And dot tventy-five only last you a veek! Vy is dot? Vot board do you pay?" His interest in the visitor was increasing.

"Eight dollars with my meals, whenever my landlady is on time."

"Eight dollars! Dot voman's robbin' you. Eight dollars! She is a skin!"

"It was the best I could do," he replied simply.

"Vot does she give you?"

"A small bedroom, my coffee in the morning, and my dinner—both served in my room on a tray."

"Yes, I see; dot's it. She charge about tree dollars for de tray. I find you someting better as dot. Kitty Cleary has a room—you don't know Kitty? Vell, you ought to begin right avay. Dot's vun voman you don't ever see again. She vas in here last night, after you left, looking for her man Mike. She take you for five dollars a veek, maybe, and you get good tings to eat and you get Kitty besides, and dot is vorth more as ten dollars. She lives across de street—you can see one of her vagons—dot big vite horse is hers, and she love dot

horse as much as she love her husband John and her boy Bobby, all but dot fool dog of Bobby's, she don't love him. You go over dere and tell her I sent you."

The stranger had relighted his pipe, and was watching the dealer clutching nervously at his spectacles, pushing them far up on his forehead, only to readjust them again on his nose. He had begun to detect behind the fat, round face of the thrifty shopkeeper a certain kindly quality. "And who may this remarkable lady be, this Mrs. Cleary?" he inquired.

"She ain't no lady. She is better as a hundert ladies —she is joost a plain vomans who keeps a express office over dere—Cleary's Express. You don't know it? Vell, dot's your fault. Dot's her boy Bobby outside de door. He has been up vid his fadder to de Grand Central for some sideboards and sofas I been buyin'. You vant to look at 'em ven dey git unloaded. They joost ready to fall to pieces, and if I patch 'em up nobody don't buy 'em. Vot I do is to leave 'em out on de sidewalk for a veek or two and let de dirt and rain get on 'em, den somebody come along and say: 'Dot is genuine. You can see right avay how olt dot is.' Dot is because de bottom is out of de sofas, and de back of de behind of de sideboard is busted. So den I get fifty dollars more for repairin' my own furniture. Ain't dot funny? And ven I send it home dey say: 'Oh, ain't dot beautiful! You ought to have seen dot ven I bought it of old Kling! You vouldn't give two dollars for it. All he did vas to scrape it down and revarnish it—and now it is joost as good as new.'

Ain't dot funny? Vy, sometimes I have to holt on to my sides for fear dey vill split vid my laughter, and my two German mens dey stuff dere fingers in dere mouths so de customers can't hear. And all de backs new, and de legs made outer udder legs, and de handles I get across at de hardvare store! Oh, I tell you, it's funny! But you know all about it. Maybe you vunce keep a place yourself?"

"No, never."

"*Vot!*"

"No, I have never been in your line of trade."

"Vell, how do you know so much?"

"I know very little, but I have always enjoyed such things."

"Vell, dot's more funny yet. You vould make a lot of money if you did. Ven you get someting for nudding you know it—I don't. You see dem—vot you call 'em—Spodes—and dot tureen, dot——"

"Lowestoft?" suggested the stranger, adjusting the mouthpiece of his pipe.

"Yes, dot Lowestoft. If you come in yesterday and say, 'Have you any olt cups and saucers and olt soup tureens?' I say: 'Yes—help yourselluf. Take your pick for tventy-five cents each for de cups and saucers.' You see, I pay nudding and I get nudding. Dot give me an idea! How vould you like to go round de store vid me and pick out de good vuns? Dot von't take you long—vait a minute—I give you dat money."

"I should not be of the slightest value, and if you are loaning me the twenty-five dollars on any other basis

than the worth of the dressing-case, I would rather not take it."

"Oh, I have finished vid de loan. Vot I say I say." He thrust his hand into a side pocket, from which he drew a flat wallet. "And dere is de money. I give you a receipt for de case."

"No, I do not want any receipt. I am quite willing you should keep it until I can either pay this back or you can loan me some more on it."

"Vell, den, I don't vant no receipt for de money. Here comes a customer. Don't you go yet. I know her. She comes most every day. She only vants to look around. Such a lot of peoples only vants to look around. Dey don't know vat dey vant and you never have it. No, it ain't no customer—it's Bobby."

The door was burst open, and a boy in a blue jumper, his cap thrust so far back on his head that it was a wonder it didn't fall off, cried out:

"Say! One of the sideboards is stuck on the iron railing and we can't get it furrards or back. Them two weiss-beers ye got down-stairs can't lift nothin' but full mugs. Send somebody to help." And the door went to with a bang.

Kling was about to call for assistance when Hans —one of the maligned—shuffled in from the rear of the store, carrying a wooden image very much in want of repair.

"Oh, dots awful good you brought dot! Set it here on dis chair—now you go avay and help vid dem sideboards. See here vunce, mister. You see, dey vas makin' de

altar over new, and one of de mens come to me last week and he says: 'Mister Kling, come vid me and buy vot ve don't vant. De school is too small, and some of de children got no place to sit down in. Ve got to sell sometings, and maybe now ve don't vant dem images.' And so I buy dem two and some olt vestments dat my Masie make so good as new, vid patches. Now, vot can I do vid dis——?"

Again the door was burst open, shutting off all possibility for conversation. Bobby's voice had now reached the volume of a fog-horn. "What do ye take us fur out here—lobsters? Dad and I can't wait all day. He's got to go down to Lafayette Place for a trunk."

Kling looked at his companion, as if to see what effect the talk had had upon him, and broke out into a suffocating chuckle. "Dot's vot it is all day long—don't you vonder I go crazy? First it is sideboards and den it is vooden saints. Here you, Bobby! Come inside vunce! I vant to ask you sometings."

"Say the rest, Skeesicks," returned the boy, eying the stranger.

"Has your mudder got empty dot room yet?"

"Yep—the shyster got to swearin', and the mother wouldn't stand for it and she fired him. We ain't keepin' no house o' refuge nor no station parlor fer bums. Holy Moses! look at the guy that's been robbin' a church! And see the nose on him all busted! Have ye started them mugs?"

Kling cleared the air with his fat hands as the boy

made for the door, and turned to his visitor once more. "Dot boy make me deaf vid his noise like a fire-engine! Now, vunce more. Vat shall I do vid dis image?"

"I give it up," observed the stranger, passing his hand over the head and down its side. "I am not very much on saints—wooden ones, I mean. He seems a good deal out of place here. Why buy such things at all, and why sell them? But that, of course, is not your point of view. I would send it back to the good father, if I were you, and have him put it behind the altar if he is ashamed to put it in front. Holy things belong to holy places. But I am already taking up too much of your time. Thank you very much for the money. It comes at an opportune moment. I shall come in once in a while to see you and, if you are willing, to talk to you."

"But you don't say nudding about Kitty's room. Vait till—oh, dere you are, you darlin' girl! You mind de store, Masie. Now you come vid me and I show you de finest vomans you never see in your whole life!"

CHAPTER III

Kitty Cleary's wide sidewalk, littered with trunks, and her narrow, choked-up office, its window hung with theatre bills and chowder-party posters, all of which were in full view of Kling's doorway, was the half-way house of any one who had five minutes to spare; it was inside its walls that closer greetings awaited those who, even with the thinnest of excuses, made bold to avail themselves of her hospitality. Drivers from the livery-stable next door, where Kitty kept her own two horses; the policeman on the beat; the night-watchman from the big store on 28th Street, just off duty, or just going on; the newsman in the early morning, who would use her benches on which to rearrange his deliveries—all were welcome as long as they behaved themselves. When they did not—and once or twice such a thing had occurred—she would throw wide the door and, with a quick movement of her right thumb, order them out, a look in her eye convincing the culprits at once that they might better obey.

Never a day passed but there was a pot of coffee simmering away at the back of the kitchen stove. Indeed, hot coffee was Kitty's standby. Many a night when she was up late poring over her delivery book, getting ready for the next day's work, a carriage or cab

would drive into the livery-stable next door, and she would send her husband out to bring in the coachman.

"Half froze, he is, waitin' outside Sherry's or Delmonico's, and nobody thinkin' of what he suffers. Go, git him, John, dear, and I'll stir up the fire. They ought to be ashamed of themselves, dancin' till God knows when—and here it is two o'clock and a string of cabs out in the cold. Thank ye, John. In with ye, my lad, and get something to warm ye up," and then the rosy-cheeked, deep-breasted, cheery little woman—she was under forty—her eyes the brighter for her thought, would begin pulling down cups and saucers from her dresser, making ready not only for the "lad," but for John and herself—and anybody else who happened to be within call.

The hospitalities of her family sitting-room, opening out of the kitchen, were reserved for her intimates. These she welcomed at any hour of the day or night, from sunrise to sunset, and even as late as two in the morning, if either business or pleasure necessitated such hours.

Tim Kelsey, the hunchback, often dropped in. Otto Kling, after Masie was abed; Digwell, the undertaker, quite a jolly fellow during off hours; Codman and Porterfield, with their respective wives; and, most welcome of all, Father Cruse, of St. Barnabas's Church around the corner, the trusted shepherd of "The Avenue"—a clear-skinned, well-built man, barely forty, whose muscular body just filled his black cassock so

that it neither fell in folds nor wrinkled crosswise, and whose fresh, ruddy face was an index of the humane, kindly, helpful life that he led. For him Kitty could never do enough.

The office, sitting-room, and kitchen, however, were not all that the expressman and his wife possessed in the way of accommodations. Up-stairs were two front bedrooms, one occupied by John and Kitty, and the other by their boy Bobby, while in the extreme rear, over the kitchen, was a single room which was let to any respectable man who could pay for it. These rooms were all reached by a staircase ascending from a narrow hall entered by a separate street-door adjoining that of the office. The door and staircase were convenient for the lodger wishing to stumble up to bed without disturbing his hosts—an event, however, that seldom happened, as Kitty was generally the last person awake in her house.

The horses, as has been said, were kept in the livery-stable next door—the brown mare, a recent purchase, and the old white horse, Jim, the pride of Kitty's heart, in a special stall. The wagons were either backed in the shed in the rear or left overnight close to the curb, with chains on the hind wheels. This was contrary to regulations, and would have been so considered but for the fact that the captain of the precinct often got his coffee in Kitty's back kitchen, as did Tom McGinniss, the big policeman, whose beat reached nearly to the tunnel, both men soothing their consciences with the argument that Kitty's job lasted so

late and began so early, sometimes a couple of hours or so before daylight, that it was not worth while to bother about her wagons, when everybody else was in bed, or ought to be.

She was smoothing old Jim's neck, crooning over him, talking to him in her motherly way, telling him what a ruffian he was and how ashamed she was of him for getting the hair worn off under his collar, and he a horse old enough to know better, Bobby's "Toodles," an animated doormat of a dog, sniffing at her skirt, when Otto and his friend hove in sight.

"The top of the mornin' to ye, Otto Kling, and ye never see a better and a finer. And what can I do for ye?—for ye wouldn't be lavin' them gimcracks of yours this time o' day unless there was somethin' up."

"No, I don't got nudding you can do for me, Kitty. It's dis gentlemans wants someting—and so I bring him over."

"That's mighty kind of ye, Otto—wait till I get me book. Careful, Mike." The Irishman had just dumped a trunk on the sidewalk, ready to be loaded on Jim's wagon. "And now," continued his mistress, "go to the office and bring me my order-book—where'll I go for your baggage, sir?"

"That is a matter I will talk about later." He had taken her all in with a rapid glance—her rosy, laughing face, her head covered by a close-fitting hood, the warm shawl crossed over her full bosom and knotted in the back, short skirt, stout shoes, and gray yarn stockings.

"I don't care where it is—Hoboken, Brooklyn—I'll get it. Why, we got a trunk last week clear from Yonkers!"

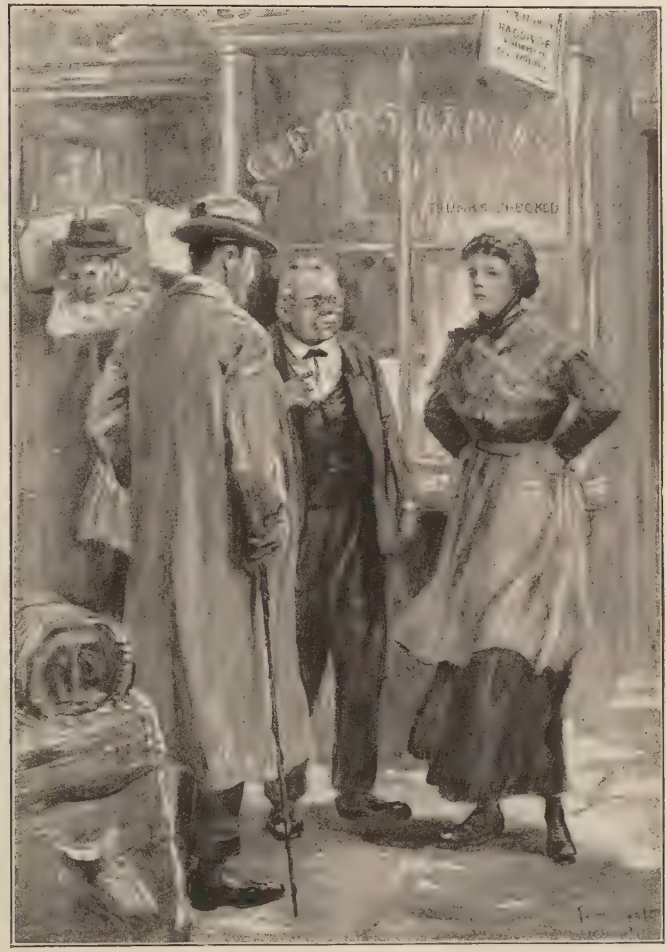
"I haven't a doubt of it, my good woman"—he was still absorbed in the contemplation of her perfect health and the air of breezy competency flowing out from her, making even the morning air seem more exhilarating—"but you may not want to go for my two trunks."

"Why not?" She was serious now, her brows knitting, trying to solve his meaning.

Kling shuffled up alongside. "It's de room he vants, Kitty. I been tellin' him about it. Bobby says dot odder man skipped an' you don't got nobody now."

"Skipped! I threw him out, me and John, for swearin' every time he stubbed his toe on the stairs," and up went her strong arms in illustration. "And it isn't yer trunks, but me room. Who might ye be wantin' it for?" She had begun to weigh him carefully in return. Up to this moment he had been to her merely the mouthpiece of an order, to be exchanged later for a card, or slip of paper, or a brass check. Now he became a personality. She swept him from head to foot with one of her "sizing-up" examinations, noticing the refinement and thoughtfulness of his clean-shaven face, the white teeth, and the careful trimming of his hair, and the way it grew down on his temples, forming a small quarter whisker.

She noted, too, how the muscles of his face had been tightened as if some effort at self-control had set them



"And who did ye say wanted me room?"

into a mask, the real man lying behind his kindly eyes, despite the quick flash that escaped from them now and then. The inspection over—and it had occupied some seconds of time—she renewed the inquiry in a more searching tone, as if she had not heard him aright at first. "And who did ye say wanted me room?"

"I wanted it."

"Yes, but who for?"

"For myself."

"What! To live in?"

"I hope so—I certainly do not want it to die in." A quiet smile trembled for an instant on his lips, momentarily lightening an expression of extreme reserve.

"You won't do no dyin' if I can help it—but ye don't know what kind a room it is. It's not mor'n twice as big as that wagon. And ye want it for yourself? Well, ye don't look it!"

"I am sorry."

"And it's only five dollars a week, and all ye want to eat—all we can give ye."

"I am glad it is not more. I may not be able to pay that for very long, but I will pay the first week in advance, and I will pay the next one in the same way and leave when my money is gone. Can I see the room?"

Again she studied him. This time it was the gray waistcoat, the well-ironed shirt and collar, English scarf, and the blackthorn stick which he carried balanced in the hollow of his arm. If he had been in overalls she would not have hesitated an instant, but she saw that this man was not of her class, nor of any

other class about her. "I don't know whether ye can or not," came the frank reply. "I'm thinkin' about it. You don't look as if ye were flat broke. If you're goin' to take me room, I don't want to be watchin' ye, and I won't! Once we know ye're clean and decent, ye can have the run of the place and welcome to it. We had one dead-beat here last month, and that's enough. Out with it now! How is it that a"—she hesitated an instant—"yes, a gentleman like you wants to live over an express office and eat what we can give ye?"

He made a slight movement with his right hand in acknowledgment of the class distinction and answered in a calm, straightforward way: "You have put it quite correctly. I am, as you are pleased to state it, flat broke—quite flat."

"Well, then, how will ye pay me?" Her question, for all its directness, implied no suspicion—but rather a certain curiosity tinged by a growing interest in the man.

"I have just borrowed twenty-five dollars from Mr. Kling on something which, for the present, I can do without."

"Pawned it?"

"No, not exactly. Mr. Kling will explain."

"It vas dot dressin'-case, Kitty, vat I showed you last night—de vun vid dem bottles vid de silver tops—and dey are real—I found dot out after you vent avay."

Kitty's glance softened, and her voice fell to a sympathetic tone. "Oh, that was yours, was it? I

might have known I was right about ye when I first see ye. Ye are a gentleman, unless ye are a thief, and I don't belave that—nor nobody can make me belave it."

Once more his hand was raised, and a smile flashed from his eyes and as quickly died out.

"That is very good of you, Mrs. Cleary. No, I am not a thief. And now about the room. Can I see it? But, before you answer, let me tell you that I have only these twenty-five dollars on which I can lay my hands. Some of this I owe to my landlady. The balance I am quite willing to turn over to you, and when it is all gone I will move somewhere else." He drew a silver watch from his pocket. "You must decide at once; it is getting late and I must be moving on."

Kitty squared herself, her hands on her hips—a favorite gesture when her mind was fully made up—looked straight at the speaker as if to reply, then suddenly catching sight of a strapping-looking fellow in blue overalls, a trunk on one shoulder, a carpetbag in his hand, called out: "John, dear, come here! I want ye. Here, Mike! You and Bobby get that steamer baggage out on the sidewalk, and don't be slack about it, for it goes to Hoboken, and there may be a block in the river and the ferry-boats behind time. Wait, I'll lend ye a hand."

"You'll lend nothing, Kitty Cleary! Get out of my way," came her husband's hearty answer. "Ye hurt yer back last week. There's men enough round here to

—stop it, I tell ye!" and he loosened her fingers from the lifting-strap.

"I can hist the two of ye, John! Go along wid ye!"

"No, Kitty, darlin'—let go of it," and with a twist of his hand and lurch of his shoulder John shot the trunk over the edge of the wagon, tossed the bag after it, and joined the group, the stranger absorbed in watching the husband and wife.

"And now the trunk's in, what's it you want, Kitty?" asked John squeezing her plump arm, as if in compensation for having had his way.

"John, dear, here's a gentleman who—what's your name?—ye haven't told me, or if ye did I've forgot it."

"Felix O'Day."

"Then you're Irish?"

"I am afraid I am—at least, my ancestors were."

"Afraid! Ye ought to be glad. I'm Irish, and so is my John here, and Bobby, and Father Cruse, and Tom McGinniss, the policeman, and the captain up at the station-house—we're all Irish, except Otto, who is as Dutch as sauerkraut! But where was I? Oh, yes! Now, John, dear, this gentleman is on his uppers, he says, and wants to hire our room and eat what we can give him."

The expressman, who stood six feet in his stockings, looked first at his wife, then at Kling, and then at the applicant, and broke out into a loud guffaw. "It's a joke, Kitty. Don't let 'em fool ye. Go on, Otto; try it somewhere else! It's my busy day. Here, Mike!"

"You drop Mike and listen, John! It's no joke—not for Mr. O'Day. You take him up-stairs and show him what we got, and down into the kitchen and the sitting-room and out into the yard. Come, now; hurry! Go 'long with him, Mr. O'Day, and come back to me when ye are through and tell me what you think of it all. And, John, take Toodles with you and lock him up. First thing I know I'll be tramplin' on him. Get out, you varmint!"

John grabbed the wad of matted hair midway between his floppy tail and perpetually moist nose, controlled his own features into a semblance of seriousness, and turned to O'Day. "This way, sir—I thought it was one of Otto's jokes. The room is only about as big as half a box car, but it's got runnin' water in the hall, and Kitty keeps it mighty clean. As to the grub, it ain't what you are accustomed to, maybe, but it's what we have ourselves, and neither of us is starvin', as ye can see," and he thumped his chest. "No, not the big door, sir; the little one. And there's a key, too, for ye, when ye're out late—and ye will be out late, or I miss my guess," and out rolled another laugh.

Kitty looked after the two until they disappeared through the smaller door, then turned and faced Kling. "I know just what's happened, Otto—a baby a month old could see it all. That man is up against it for the first time. He'd rather die than beg, and he'll keep on sellin' his traps until there's nothin' left but the clothes he stands in. He may be a duke, for all ye

know, or maybe only a plain Irish gentleman come to grief. Them bottles ye showed me last night had arms engraved on 'em, and his initials. I noticed partic'-lar, for I've seen them things before. My father, when he was young, was second groom for a lord and used to tell me about the silver in the house and the arms on the sides of the carriages. What he's left home for the dear God only knows; but it will come out, and when it does it won't be what anybody thinks. And he's got a fine way wid him, and a clear look out of his eye, and I'll bet ye he's tellin' the truth and all of it. Here they come now, and I'm glad they've got rid of that rag baby of Bobby's." She turned to her husband. "And, John, dear, don't forget that sewing-machine—oh, yes, I see, you've got it in the wagon—go on wid ye, then!—Well, Mr. O'Day, how is it? Purty small and cramped, ain't it? And there's a chair missin' that I took downstairs, which I'll put back. And there's a cotton cover belongs to the table. Won't suit, will it?" and a shade of disappointment crossed her face.

"The room will answer very well, Mrs. Cleary. I can see the work of your deft hands in every corner. I have been living in one much larger, but this is more like a home. And do I get my breakfast and dinner and the room for the pound—I mean for the five dollars?"

"You do, and welcome, and somethin' in the middle of the day if ye happen to be around and hungry."

"And can I move in to-day?"

"Ye can."

"Then I will go down and pay what I owe and see about getting my boxes. And now, here is your money," and he held out two five-dollar bills.

Kitty stretched her two hands far behind her back, her brown holland over-apron curving inward with the movement. "I won't touch it; ye can have the room and ye can keep your money. When I want it I'll ask fer it. Now tell me where I can get your trunks. Mike will go fer 'em and bring 'em back."

A new, strange look shone out from the keen, searching eyes of O'Day. His interest in the woman had deepened. "And you have no misgivings and are sure you will get your rent?"

"Just as sure as I am that me name is Kitty Cleary, and that is not altogether because you're an Irishman but because ye are a gentleman."

This time O'Day made her a little bow, the lines of his face softening, his eyes sparkling with sudden humor at her speech. He stepped forward, called to the man who was still handling the luggage, and, in the tone of one ordering his groom, said: "Here, Mike!—Did you say his name was Mike?—Go, if you please, to this address, just below Union Square—I will write it on a card—any time to-day after six o'clock. I will meet you there and show you the trunks —there are two of them." Then he turned to Otto, still standing by, a silent and absorbed spectator.

"I have also to thank you, Mr. Kling. It was very kind of you, and I am sure I shall be very happy here. After I am settled I shall come over and see whether I

can be of some service to you in going through your stock. There may be some other things that are valuable which you have mislaid. And then, again, I should like to see something more of your little daughter—she is very lovable, and so is her dog."

"Vell, vy don't you come now? Masie don't go to school to-day, and I keep her in de shop. I been tinkin' since you and Kitty been talkin'—Kitty don't make no mistakes: vot Kitty says goes. Look here, Kitty, vun minute—come close vunce—I vant to speak to you."

O'Day, who had been about to give a reason why he could not "come now," and who had halted in his reply in order to hunt his pockets for a card on which to write his address, hearing Kling's last words, withdrew to the office in search of both paper and pencil.

"Now, see here, Kitty! Dot mans is a vunderful man—de most *vunderful* man I have seen since I been in 445. You know dem cups and saucers vat I bought off dot olt vomans who came up from Baltimore? Do you know dot two of 'em is vorth more as ten dollars? He find dot out joost as soon as he pick 'em up, and he find out about my chairs, and vich vas fakes and vich vas goot. Vot you tink of my givin' him a job takin' my old cups and my soup tureens and stuff and go sell 'em someveres? I don't got nobody since dot tam fool of a Svede go avay. Vat you tink?"

"He can have my room—that's what I think! You heard what I said to him! That's all the answer you'll get out of me, Otto Kling."

"An' you don't tink dot he'd git avay vid de stuff und ve haf to hunt up or down Second Avenue in the pawn-shops to git 'em back?"

"No, I don't!"

"Den, by golly, I take him on, und I gif him every veek vat he pay you in board."

Kitty broke into one of her derisive laughs. "*You will!* Ain't that good of ye? Ye'll give him enough to starve on, that's what it is. Ye ought to be ashamed of yourself, Otto Kling!"

"Vell, but I don't know vat he is vurth yet."

"Well, then, tell him so, but don't cheat him out of everything but his bare board; and that's what ye'd be doin'. Ye know he's pawnin' his stuff; ye know ye got five times the worth of your money in the dressing-case he give up to ye! See here, Otto! Before ye offer him that five dollars a week ye better get on the other side of big John there, where ye'll be safe, and holler it at him over them trunks, or ye'll find yourself flat on your back."

"All right, Kitty, all right! Don't git oxcited. I didn't mean nudding. I do just vat you say. I gif him more. Oh! Here you are! Mr. O'Day, vud you let me speak to you vun minute? Suppose dot I ask you to come into my shop as a clerk, like, and pay you vat I can—of course, you are new und it vill take some time, but I can pay sometings—vud you come?"

O'Day gave an involuntary start and from under his heavy brows there shot a keen, questioning glance. "What would you want me to do?" he asked evenly.

"Vell—vait on de customers, and look over de stock, and buy tings ven dey come in."

"You certainly cannot be serious, Mr. Kling. You know nothing about me. I am an entire stranger and must continue to be. With the exception of my landlady, who, if she knows my name, forgets it every time she comes up for her rent, there is not a human being in New York to whom I could apply for a reference. Are you accustomed to pick up strangers out of the street and take them into your shops—and your homes?" he added, smiling at Kitty, who had been following the conversation closely.

"But you is a different kind of a mans."

No answer came. The man was lost in thought.

"Ye'd better think it over, sir," said Kitty, laying a strong, persuasive hand on his wrist. "It's near by, and ye can have your meals early or late as ye plaze, and the work ain't hard. My Mike does the liftin' and two big fat Dutchies helps."

"But I know nothing about the business, Mrs. Cleary—nothing about any business, for that matter. I should only be a disappointment to Mr. Kling. I would rather keep his friendship and look elsewhere."

Kitty relaxed her hold of his wrist. "Then ye have been lookin' for work?" she asked. The inquiry sprang hot from her heart.

"I have not, so far, but I shall have to very soon."

She threw back her head and faced the two men. "Ye'll look no further, Mr. O'Day. You go over to

Otto's and go to work; and it will be to-night after you gets your things stowed away. And ye'll pay him ten dollars a week, Otto, for the first month, and more the second if he earns it, which he will. Now are ye all satisfied, or shall I say it over?"

"One moment, please, Mrs. Cleary. If I may interrupt," he laughed, his reserve broken through at last by the friendly interest shown by the strangers about him, "and what will be the hours of my service?" Then, turning to Otto: "Perhaps you, Mr. Kling, can best tell me."

"Vot you mean?"

"How early must I come in the morning, and until how late must I stay at night?"

The dealer hesitated, then answered slowly, "In de morning at eight o'clock, and"—but, seeing a cloud cross O'Day's face, added: "Or maybe haf past eight vill do."

"And at night?"

"Vell—you can't tell. Sometimes it is more late as udder times—about nine o'clock ven I have packing to do."

O'Day shook his head.

"Vell, den, say eight o'clock."

Again O'Day shook his head slowly and thoughtfully as if some insurmountable obstacle had suddenly arisen before him. Then he said firmly: "I am afraid I must decline your kind offer, Mr. Kling. The latest I could stay on any evening is seven o'clock—some days I might have to leave at six—certainly no later

than half past. I suppose you have dinner at seven, Mrs. Cleary?"

Kitty nodded. She was too interested in this new phase of the situation to speak.

"Yes, seven would have to be the hour, Mr. Kling," said O'Day.

"Vell, make it seven o'clock, den."

"And if," he continued in a still more serious voice, "I should on certain days—absent myself entirely, would that matter?"

Otto was being slowly driven into a corner, but he determined not to flinch with Kitty standing by. "No, I tink I git along vid my little Beesvings."

O'Day studied the pavement for an instant, then looked into space as if seeking to clear his mind of every conflicting thought, and said at last, slowly and deliberately: "Very well. Then I will be with you in the morning at nine o'clock. Now, good day, Mrs. Cleary. I know we will get on very well together, and you, too, Mr. Kling. Thank you for your confidence." Then, turning to the Irishman: "Don't forget, Mike, that the street-door is open and that I'm up two flights. You will find the number on this card."

CHAPTER IV

The customary scene took place when Felix, late that afternoon, handed his landlady the overdue rent. Now that the two crisp bills which O'Day owed her lay in her hand, she was ready to pass them back to him if the full payment at all embarrassed him. Indeed, she had never had a more quiet and decent lodger, and she hoped it didn't mean he was "goin' away," and, if she was rather sharp with him the night before, it was because she had been "that nervous of late."

But Felix, ignoring her overtures, only shook his head in a good-natured way. He would begin packing at once, and the express wagon would be here at six. She would know it by the white horse which the man was driving. When his trunks were finished he would put them outside his bedroom door, and please not to forget his mackintosh and leather hat-case which he would leave inside the room.

So the packing began. First the sole-leather trunk, from which he had taken the hapless dressing-case the night before, was pulled out and the heavy black tin box hauled into position and unlocked. With the raising of the scarred and dented top a mass of letters and papers came into view, filling the box to the brim—some tied with red tape, others in big envelopes. In

a corner lay some photographs—one in a gilt frame, the edge showing clear of the tissue-paper in which it was wrapped. This he took out and studied long and earnestly, his lips tightly pressed together. Retying the paper, he tucked them all back into place, turned the key, shook the box to see that the lock held tight, picked it up with one hand by its side handle, and, throwing open the door, deposited it on the landing outside. Its leather companion was then placed beside it, the hat-case crowning the whole.

Mike's voice was now heard in the narrow front hall. "How fur is it up, mum? Oh, another flight! Begorra, it's as dark as a coal-hole and about as dirty!" This was followed by: "Oh, is that you, sor? How many pieces have you?"

"Only two, Mike; and the mackintosh and hat-case," answered Felix, who had watched him stumbling up the stairs until his red face was level with the landing. "By the way, mind you don't lose the rubber coat, for, although I never wear an overcoat, this comes in well when it rains."

"I'll never take me eyes off it. I bet ye niver bought that down on the Bowery from a Johnny-hand-me-down!"

"And, Mike!"

"Yes, sor?"

"Will you please say to Mrs. Cleary that I may not be in to-night before eleven o'clock?"

"Eleven! Why that's the shank o' the evenin' for her, sor. If it was twelve, or after, she'd be up." Then

he bent forward and whispered: "I should think ye would be glad, sor, to get out of this rookery."

Felix nodded in assent, waited until the leather trunk had been dumped into the wagon, watched Mike remount the stairs until he had reached his landing, helped him to load up the balance of his luggage—the tin box on one shoulder, the coat over the other, the hat-case in the free hand—and then walked back to his empty room. Here he made a thoughtful survey of the dismal place in which he had spent so many months, picked up his blackthorn stick, and, leaving the door ajar, walked slowly down-stairs, his hand on the rail as a guide in the dark.

"And you aren't comin' back, sir?" remarked the landlady, who had listened for his steps.

"That, madame, one never can tell."

"Well, you are always welcome."

"Thank you—good-by."

"Good-by, sir; my husband's out or he would like to shake your hand."

O'Day bowed slightly and stepped into the street, his stick under his arm, his hands hooked behind his back. That he had no immediate purpose in view was evident from the way he loitered along, stopping to look at the store windows or to scrutinize the passing crowd, each person intent on his or her special business. By the time he had reached Broadway the upper floors of the business buildings were dark, but the windows of the restaurants, cigar shops, and saloons had begun to blaze out and a throng of pleasure seekers to replace

that of the shoppers and workers. This aspect of New York appealed to him most. There were fewer people moving about the streets and in less of a hurry, and he could study them the closer.

In a cheap restaurant off Union Square he ate a spare and inexpensive meal, whiled away an hour over the free afternoon papers, went out to watch an audience thronging into one of the smaller theatres, and then boarded a down-town car. When he reached Trinity Church the clock was striking, and, as he often did when here at this hour, he entered the open gate and, making his way among the shadows sat down, on a flat tomb. The gradual transition from the glare and rush of the up-town streets to the sombre stillness of this ancient graveyard always seemed to him like the shifting of films upon a screen, a replacement of the city of the living by the city of the dead. High up in the gloom soared the spire of the old church, its cross lost in shadows. Still higher, their roofs melting into the dusky blue vault, rose the great office-buildings, crowding close as if ready to pounce upon the small space protected only by the sacred ashes of the dead.

For some time he sat motionless, listening to the muffled peals of the organ. Then the humiliating events of the last twenty-four hours began crowding in upon his memory: the insolent demands of his landlady; the guarded questions of Kling when he inspected the dressing-case; the look of doubt on both their faces and the changes wrought in their manner and

speech when they found he was able to pay his way. Suddenly something which up to that moment he had held at bay gripped him.

"It was money, then, which counted," he said to himself, forgetting for the moment Kitty's refusal to take it. And if money were so necessary, how long could he earn it? Kling would soon discover how useless he was, and then the tin box, emptied of its contents and the last keepsake pawned or sold, the end would come.

None of these anxieties had ever assailed him before. He had been like a man walking in a dream, his gaze fixed on but one exit, regardless of the dangers besetting his steps. Now the truth confronted him. He had reached the limit of his resources. To hope for much from Kling was idle. Such a situation could not last, nor could he count for long either on the friendship or the sympathy of the big-hearted expressman's wife. She had been absolutely sincere, and so had her husband, but that made it all the more incumbent upon him to preserve his own independence while still pursuing the one object of his life with undiminished effort.

A flood of light from the suddenly opened church-door, followed by a burst of pent-up melody, recalled him to himself. He waited until all was dark again, rose to his feet, passed through the gate and, with a brace of his shoulders and quickened step, walked on into Wall Street.

As he made his way along the deserted thoroughfare,

where but a few hours since the very air had been charged with a nervous energy whose slightest vibration was felt the world over, the sombre stillness of the ancient graveyard seemed to have followed him. Save for a private watchman slowly tramping his round and an isolated foot-passenger hurrying to the ferry, no soul but himself was stirring or awake except, perhaps, behind some electric light in a lofty building where a janitor was retiring or, lower down, some belated bookkeeper in search of an error.

Leaving the grim row of tall columns guarding the front of the old custom-house, he turned his steps in the direction of the docks, wheeled sharply to the left, and continued up South Street until he stopped in front of a ship-chandler's store.

Some one was at work inside, for the rays of a lantern shed their light over piles of old cordage and heaps of rusty chains flanking the low entrance.

Picking his way around some barrels of oil, he edged along a line of boxes filled with ship's stuff until he reached an inside office, where, beside a kerosene lamp placed on a small desk littered with papers, sat a man in shirt-sleeves. At the sound of O'Day's step the occupant lifted his head and peered out. The visitor passed through the doorway.

"Good evening, Carlin; I hoped you would still be up. I stopped on the way down or I should have been here earlier."

A man of sixty, with a ruddy, weather-beaten face set in a half-moon of gray whiskers, the ends tied under

his chin, sprang to his feet. "Ah! Is that you, Mr. Felix? I been a-wonderin' where you been a-keepin' yourself. Take this chair; it's more comfortable. I was thinkin' somehow you might come in to-night, and so I took a shy at my bills to have somethin' to do. I suppose"—he stopped, and in a whisper added: "I suppose you haven't heard anything, have you?"

"No; have you?"

"Not a word," answered the ship-chandler gravely.

"I thought perhaps you might have had a letter," urged Felix.

"Not a line of any kind," came the answer, followed by a sidewise movement of the gray head, as if its owner had long since abandoned hope from that quarter.

"Do you think anything is the matter?"

"Nothin', or I should 'a' 'eard. My notion is that Martha kep' on to Toronto with that sick man she nursed on the steamer. Maybe she's got work stiddy and isn't a-goin' to come back."

"But she would have let you *know?*" There was a ring of anxiety now, tinged with a certain impatience.

"Perhaps she would, Mr. Felix, and perhaps she wouldn't. Since our mother died Martha gets rather cocky sometimes. Likes to be her own boss and earn her own living. I've often 'eard her say it before I left 'ome, and she *has* earned it, I must say—and she's got to, same as all of us. I suppose you been keepin' it up same as usual—trampin' and lookin'?"

"Yes." This came as the mere stating of a fact.

"And I suppose there ain't nothin' new—no clew—nothin' you can work on?" The speaker felt assured there was not, but it might be an encouragement to suggest its possibility.

"No, not the slightest clew."

"Better give it up, Mr. Felix, you're only wastin' your time. Be worse maybe when you do come up agin it." The ship-chandler was in earnest; every intonation proved it.

O'Day arose from his seat and looked down at his companion. "That is not my way, Carlin, nor is it yours; and I have known you since I was a boy."

"And you are goin' to keep it up, Mr. Felix?"

"Yes, until I know the end or reach my own."

"Well, then, God's help go with ye!"

Into the shadows again—past long rows of silent warehouses, with here and there a flickering gas-lamp—until he reached Dover Street. He had still some work to do up-town, and Dover Street would furnish a short cut along the abutment of the great bridge, and so on to the Elevated at Franklin Square.

He was evidently familiar with its narrow, uneven sidewalk, for he swung without hesitation into the gloom and, with hands hooked behind his back, his stick held, as was his custom, close to his armpit, made his way past its shambling hovels and warehouses. Now and then he would pause, following with his eyes the curve of the great steel highway, carried on the stone shoulders of successive arches, the sweep of its

lines marked by a procession of lights, its outstretched, interlocked palms gripped close. The memory of certain streets in London came to him—those near its own great bridges, especially the city dump at Blackfriars and the begrimed buildings hugging the stone knees of London Bridge, choking up the snakelike alleys and byways leading to the Embankment.

Crossing under the Elevated, he continued along the side of the giant piers and wheeled into a dirt-choked, ill-smelling street, its distant outlet a blaze of electric lights. It was now the dead hour of the twenty-four—the hour before the despatch of the millions of journals, damp from the presses. He was the only human being in sight.

Suddenly, when within a hundred feet of the end of the street, a figure detached itself from a deserted doorway. Felix caught his stick from under his armpit as the man held out a hand.

"Say, I want you to give me the price of a meal."

Felix tightened his hold on the stick. The words had conveyed a threat.

"This is no place for you to beg. Step out where people can see you."

"I'm hungry, mister." He had now taken in the width of O'Day's shoulders and the length of his forearm. He had also seen the stick.

Felix stepped back one pace and slipped his hand down the blackthorn. "Move on, I tell you, where I can look you over—quick!—I mean it."

"I ain't much to look at." The threat was out of

his voice now. "I ain't eaten nothin' since yisterday, mister, and I got that out of a ash-barrel. I'm up agin it hard. Can't you see I ain't lyin'? You ain't never starved or you'd know. You ain't—" He wavered, his eyes glittering, edged a step nearer, and with a quick lunge made a grab for O'Day's watch.

Felix sidestepped with the agility of a cat, struck straight out from the shoulder, and, with a twist of his fingers in the tramp's neck-cloth, slammed him flat against the wall, where he crouched, gasping for breath. "Oh, that's it, is it?" he said calmly, loosening his hold.

The man raised both hands in supplication. "Don't kill me! Listen to me—I ain't no thief—I'm desperate. When you didn't give me nothin' and I got on to the watch—I got crazy. I'm glad I didn't git it. I been a-walkin' the streets for two weeks lookin' for work. Last night I slep' in a coal-bunker down by the docks, under the bridge, and I was goin' there agin when you come along. I never tried to rob nobody before. Don't run me in—let me go this time. Look into my face; you can see for yourself I'm hungry! I'll never do it agin. Try me, won't you?" His tears were choking him, the elbow of his ragged sleeve pressed to his eyes.

Felix had listened without moving, trying to make up his mind, noting the drawn, haggard face, the staring eyes and dry, fevered lips—all evidences of either hunger or vice, he was uncertain which.

Then gradually, as the man's sobs continued, there stole over him that strange sense of kinship in pain

which comes to us at times when confronted with another's agony. The differences between them—the rags of the one and the well-brushed garments of the other, the fact that one skulked with his misery in dark alleys while the other bore his on the open highways—counted as nothing. He and this outcast were bound together by the common need of those who find the struggle overwhelming. Until that moment his own sufferings had absorbed him. Now the throb of the world's pain came to him and sympathies long dormant began to stir.

"Straighten up and let me see your face," he said at last, intent on the tramp's abject misery. "Out here where the full light can fall on it—that's right! Now tell me about yourself. How long have you been like this?"

The man dragged himself to his feet.

"Ever since I lost my job." The question had calmed him. There was a note of hope in it.

"What work did you do?"

"I'm a plumber's helper."

"Work stopped?"

"No, a strike—I wouldn't quit, and they fired me."

"What happened then?"

"She went away."

"Who went away?"

"My wife."

"When?"

"About a month back."

"Did you beat her?"

"No, there was another man."

"Younger than you?"

"Yes."

"How old was she?"

"Eighteen."

"A girl, then."

"Yes, if you put it that way. She was all I had."

"Have you seen her since?"

"No, and I don't want to."

These questions and answers had followed in rapid succession, Felix searching for the truth and the man trying to give it as best he could.

With the last answer the man drew a step nearer and, in a voice which was fast getting beyond his control, said: "You know now, don't you? You can see it plain as day how long it takes to make a bum of a man when he's up agin things like that. You—" He paused, listened intently, and sprang back, hugging the wall. "What's that? Somebody comin'! My God! It's a cop! Don't tell him—say you won't tell him—say it! *Say it!*"

Felix gripped his wrist. "Pull yourself together and keep still."

The officer, who was idly swinging a club as if for companionship along his lonely beat, stopped short. "Any trouble, sir?" he said as soon as he had Felix's outline and bearing clear.

"No, thank you, officer. Only a friend of mine who needs a little looking after. I'll take care of him."

"All right, sir," and he passed on down the narrow street.

The man gave a long breath and staggered against the wall. Felix caught him by his trembling shoulders. "Now, brace up. The first thing you need is something to eat. There is a restaurant at the corner. Come with me."

"They won't let me in."

"I'll take care of that."

Felix entered first. "What is there hot this time of night, barkeeper?"

"Frankfurters and beans, boss."

"Any coffee?"

"Sure."

"Send a double portion of each to this table," and he pulled out a chair. "Here's a man who has missed his dinner. Is that enough?" and he laid down a dollar bill—one Kling had given him.

"Forty cents change, boss."

"Keep it, and see he gets all he wants. And now here," he said to the tramp, "is another dollar to keep you going," and with a shift of his stick to his left arm Felix turned on his heel, swung back the door, and was lost in the throng.

Kitty was up and waiting for him when he lifted the hinged wooden flap which provided an entrance for the privileged and, guided by the glow of the kerosene lamp, turned the knob of her kitchen door. She was close to the light, reading, the coffee-pot singing

away on the stove, the aroma of its contents filling the room.

"I hope I have not kept you up, Mrs. Cleary. You had my message by Mike, did you not?" he asked in an apologetic tone.

"Yes, I got the message, and I got the trunks; they're up-stairs, and if you had given Mike the keys I'd have 'em unpacked by this time and all ready for you. As to my bein' up—I'm always up, and I got to be. John and Mike is over to Weehawken, and Bobby's been to the circus and just gone to bed, and I've been readin' the mornin' paper—about the only time I get to read it. Will ye sit down and wait till John comes in? Hold on 'til I get ye a cup of hot coffee and——"

"No, Mrs. Cleary. I will go to bed, if you do not mind."

"Oh, but the coffee will put new life into ye, and——"

"Thanks, but it would be more likely to put it *out* of me if it kept me awake. Can I reach my room this way or must I go outside?"

"Ye can go through this door—wait, I'll go wid ye and show ye about the light and where ye'll find the water. It's dark on the stairs and ye may stumble. I'll go on ahead and turn up the gas in the hall," she called back, as she mounted the steps and threw wide his room door. "Not much of a place, is it? But ye can get plenty of fresh air, and the bed's not bad. Ye can see for yourself," and her stout fist sunk into its middle. "And there's your trunks and tin chest, and the hat-box is beside the wash-stand, and the water-

proof coat's in the closet. We have breakfast at seven o'clock, and ye'll eat down-stairs wid me and John. And now good night to ye."

Felix thanked her for her attention in his simple, straightforward way, and, closing the door upon her, dropped into a chair.

The night's experience had been like a sudden awakening. His anxiety over his dwindling finances and his disappointment over Carlin's news had been put to flight by the suffering of the man who had tried to rob him. There were depths, then, to which human suffering might drive a man, depths he himself had never imagined or reached—horrible, deadly depths, without light or hope, benumbing the best in a man, destroying his purposes by slow, insidious stages.

He arose from his chair and began walking up and down the small room, stopping now and then to inspect a bureau drawer or to readjust one of the curtains shading the panes of glass. In the same absent-minded way he drew out one of the trunks, unlocked it, paused now and then with some garment in his hand only to awake again to consciousness and resume his task, pushing the trunk back at last under the bed and continuing his walk about the narrow room, always haunted by the tramp's haggard, hopeless look.

Again he felt the mysterious sense of kinship in pain that wipes away all distinctions. With it, too, there came suddenly another sense—that of an overwhelming compassion out of which new purposes are born to human souls.

The encounter, then, had been both a blessing and a warning. He would now stand guard against the onslaught of his own sorrows while keeping up the fight, and this with renewed vigor. He would earn money, too, since this was so necessary, laboring with his hands, if need be; and he would do it all with a wide-open heart.

CHAPTER V

If O'Day's presence was a welcome addition to Kitty's household, it was nothing compared to the effect produced at Kling's. Long before the month was out he had not only earned his entire wages five times over by the changes he had wrought in the arrangement and classification of the stock, but he had won the entire confidence of his employer. Otto had surrendered when an old customer who had been in the habit of picking up rare bits of china, Japanese curios, and carvings at his own value had been confronted with the necessity of either paying Felix's price or going away without it, O'Day having promptly quadrupled the price on a piece of old Dresden, not only because the purchaser was compelled to have it to complete his set but because the interview had shown that the buyer was well aware he had obtained the former specimens at one-fourth of their value.

And the same discernment was shown when he was purchasing old furniture, brass, and so-called Sheffield plate to increase Otto's stock. If the articles offered could still boast of either handle, leg, or back of their original state and the price was fair, they were almost always bought, but the line was drawn at the fraudulent and "plugged-up" sideboards and chairs with their legs shot full of genuine worm-holes; ancient

Oriental stuffs of the time of the early Persians (one year out of a German loom), rare old English plate, or undoubted George III silver, decorated with coats of arms or initials and showing those precious little dents only produced by long service—the whole fresh from a Connecticut factory. These never got past his scrutiny. While it was true, as he had told Kling, that he knew very little in the way of trade and commerce—nothing which would be of use to any one—he was a never-failing expert when it came to what is generally known as "antiques" and "bric-à-brac."

Masie—Kling's only child—a slender, graceful little creature with a wealth of gold-yellow hair flying about her pretty shoulders and a pair of blue eyes in which were mirrored the skies of ten joyous springs, had given her heart to him at once. She had never forgotten his gentle treatment of her dog Fudge, whose attack that first morning Felix had understood so well, lifting and putting the refractory animal back in her arms instead of driving him off with a kick. Fudge, whose manners were improving, had not forgotten either and was always under O'Day's feet except when being fondled by the child.

Until Felix came she had had no other companions, some innate reserve keeping her from romping with the children on the street, her sole diversion, except when playing at home among her father's possessions or making a visit to Kitty, being found in the books of fairy-tales which the old hunchback, Tim Kelsey, had lent her. At first this natural shyness had held her

aloof even from O'Day, content only to watch his face as he answered her childish appeals. But before the first week had passed she had slipped her hand into his, and before the month was over her arms were around his neck, her fresh, soft cheek against his own, cuddling close as she poured out her heart in a continuous flow of prattle and laughter, her father looking on in blank amazement.

For, while Kling loved her as most fathers love their motherless daughters, Felix had seen at a glance that he was either too engrossed in his business or too dense and unimaginative to understand so winning a child. She was Masie, "dot little girl of mine dot don't got no mudder," or "Beesvings, who don't never be still," but that was about as far as his notice of her went, except sending her to school, seeing that she was fed and clothed, and on such state occasions as Christmas, New Year's, or birthdays, giving her meaningless little presents, which, in most instances, were shut up in her bureau drawers, never to be looked at again.

Kitty, who remembered the child's mother as a girl with a far-away look in her eyes and a voice of surprising sweetness, always maintained that it was a shame for Kling, who was many years her senior, to have married the girl at all.

"Not, John, dear, that Otto isn't a decent man, as far as he goes," she had once said to him, when the day's work was over and they were discussing their neighbors, "and that honest, too, that he wouldn't get away with a sample trunk weighing a ton if it was

nailed fast to the sidewalk, and a good friend of ours who wouldn't go back on us, and never did. But that wife of his, John! If she wasn't as fine as the best of 'em, then I miss my guess. She got it from that father of hers—the clock-maker that never went out in the daytime, and hid himself in his back shop. There was something I never understood about the two of 'em and his killing himself when he did. Why, look at that little Masie! Can't ye see she is no more Kling's daughter than she is mine? Ye can't hatch out humming'-birds by sittin' on ducks' eggs, and that's what's the matter over at Otto's."

"Well, whose eggs were they?" John had inquired, half asleep by the stove, his tired legs outstretched, the evening paper dropping from his hand.

"Oh, I don't say that they are not Kling's right enough, John. Masie is his child, I know. But what I say is that the mother is stamped all over the darling, and that Otto can't put a finger on any part and call it his own."

Whether Kitty were right or wrong regarding the mystery is no part of our story, but certain it was that the soul of the unhappy young mother looked through the daughter's eyes, that the sweetness of the child's voice was hers, and the grace of every movement a direct inheritance from one whose frail spirit had taken so early a flight.

To Felix this companionship, with the glimpses it gave him of a child's heart, refreshed his own as a summer rain does a thirsty plant. Had she been his daugh-

ter, or his little sister, or his niece, or grandchild, a certain sense of responsibility on his part and of filial duty on hers would have clouded their perfect union. He would have had matters of education to insist upon—perhaps of clothing and hygiene. She would have had her secrets—hidden paths on which she wandered alone—things she could never tell to one in authority. As it was, bound together as they were by only a mutual recognition, their joy in each other knew no bounds. To Masie he was a refuge, some one who understood every thought before she had uttered it; to O'Day she was a never-ending and warming delight.

And so this man of forty-five folded his arms about this child of ten, and held her close, the opening chalice of her budding girlhood widening hourly at his touch—a sight to be reverenced by every man and never to be forgotten by one privileged to behold it.

And with the intimacy which almost against his will held him to the little shop, there stole into his life a certain content. Springs long dried in his own nature bubbled again. He felt the sudden, refreshing sense of those who, after pent-up suffering, find the quickening of new life within.

Mike noticed the change in the cheery greetings and in the passages of Irish wit with which the new clerk welcomed him whenever he appeared in the store, and so did Kling, and even the two Dutchies when Felix would drop into the cellar searching for what was still good enough to be made over new. And so did Kitty and John and all at their home.

Masie alone noticed nothing. To her, "Uncle Felix," as she now called him, was always the same adorable and comprehending companion, forever opening up to her new vistas of interest, never too busy to answer her questions, never too preoccupied to explain the different objects he was handling. If she were ever in the way, she was never made to feel it. Instead, so gentle and considerate was he, that she grew to believe herself his most valuable assistant, daily helping him to arrange the various new acquisitions.

One morning in June when they were busy over a lot of small curios, arranging bits of jade, odd silver watches, seals, and pinchbeck rings, in a glass case that had been cleaned and revarnished, the door opened and an old fellow strolled in—an odd-looking old fellow, with snow-white hair and beard, wearing a black sombrero and a shirt cut very low in the neck. But for a pair of kindly eyes, which looked out at you from beneath the brim of the hat, he might have been mistaken for one of the dwarfs in "Rip Van Winkle." Fudge, having now been disciplined by Felix, only sniffed at his trousers.

"I see an old gold frame in your window," began the new customer. "Might I measure it?"

"Which one, sir?" replied Felix. "There are half a dozen of them, I believe."

"Well; will you please come outside? And I will point it out. It is the Florentine, there in the corner—perhaps a reproduction, but it looks to me like the real thing."

"It is a Florentine," answered Felix. "There are two or three pictures in the Uffizi with similar frames, if I recall them aright. Would you like a look at it?"

"I don't want to trouble you to take it out," said the old man apologetically. "It might not do, and I can't afford to pay much for it anyway. But I would like to measure it; I've got an Academy picture which I think will just fit it, but you can't always tell. No, I guess I'll let it go. It's all covered up, and you would have to move everything to reach it."

"No, I won't have to move a thing. Here, you bunch of sunshine! Squeeze in there, Masie, dear, and let me know how wide and high that frame is—the one next the glass. Take this rule."

The child caught up the rule and, followed by Fudge, who liked nothing so well as rummaging, crept among the jars, mirrors, and candelabra crowding the window, her steps as true as those of a kitten. "Twenty inches by thirty-one—no, thirty," she laughed back, tucking her little skirts closer to her shapely limbs so as to clear a tiny table set out with cups and saucers.

"You're sure it's thirty?" repeated the painter.

"Yes, sir, thirty," and she crept back and laid the rule in O'Day's hand.

"Thank you, my dear young lady," bowed the old gnome. "It is a pleasure to be served by one so obliging and bright. And I am glad to tell you," he added, turning to O'Day, "that it's a fit—an exact fit. I thought I was about right. I carry things in my eye. I bought a head once in Venice, about a foot square,

and in Spain three months afterward, on my way down the hill leading from the Alhambra to the town, there on a wall outside a bric-à-brac shop hung a frame which I bought for ten francs, and when I got to Paris and put them together, I'll be hanged if they didn't fit as if they had been made for each other."

"And I know the shop!" broke out Felix, to Masie's astonishment. "It's just before you get to the small chapel on the left."

"By cracky, you're right! How long since you were there?"

"Oh, some five years now."

"Picking up things to sell here, I suppose. Spain used to be a great place for furniture and stuffs; I've got a lot of them still—bought a whole chest of embroideries once in Seville, or rather, at that hospital where the big Murillo hangs. You must know that picture—Moses striking water from the rock—best thing Murillo ever did."

Felix remembered it, and he also remembered many of the important pictures in the Prado, especially the great Velasquez and the two Goyas, and that head of Ribera which hung on the line in the second gallery on the right as you entered. And before the two enthusiasts were aware of what was going on around them, Masie and Fudge had slipped off to dine upstairs with her father, Felix and the garrulous old painter still talking—renewing their memories with a gusto and delight unknown to the old artist for years.

"And now about that frame!" the gnome at last found time to say. "I've got so little money that I'd rather swap something for it, if you don't mind. Come down and see my stuff! It's only in 10th Street—not twenty minutes' walk. Maybe you can sell some of my things for me. And bring that blessed little girl—she's the dearest, sweetest thing I've seen for an age. Your daughter?"

Felix laughed gently. "No, I wish she were. She is Mr. Kling's child."

"And your name?"

"O'Day."

"Irish, of course—well, all the same, come down any morning this week. My name is Ganger; I'm on the fourth floor—been there twenty-two years. You'll have to walk up—we all do. Yes, I'll expect you."

Kling, whom Felix consulted, began at once to demur. He knew all about the building on 10th Street. More than one of his old frames—part of the clearing-out sale of some Southern homestead, the portraits being reserved because unsalable—had resumed their careers on the walls of the Academy as guardians and protectors of masterpieces painted by the denizens of this same old rattletrap, the Studio Building. Some of its tenants, too, had had accounts with him—which had been running for more than a year. Bridley, the marine painter; Manners, who took pupils; Springlake, the landscapist; and half a dozen others had been in the habit of dropping into his shop on the lookout for

something good in Dutch cabinets at half-price, or no price at all, until Felix, without knowing where they had come from, had put an end to the practice.

"Got a fellow up to Kling's who looks as if he had been a college athlete, and knows it all. Can't fool him for a cent," was the talk now, instead of "Keep at the old Dutchman and you may get it. He don't know the difference between a Chippendale sideboard and a shelf rack from Harlem. Wait for a rainy day and go in. He'll be feeling blue, and you'll be sure to get it."

Kling, therefore, when he heard some days later, of Felix's proposed visit, began turning over his books, looking up several past-due accounts. But Felix would have none of it.

"I'm going on a collecting tour, Mr. Kling, this lovely June morning," he laughed, "but not for money. We will look after that later on. And I will take Masie. Come, child, get your hat. Mr. Ganger wanted you to come, and so do I. Call Hans, Mr. Kling, if the shop gets full. We will be back in an hour."

"Vell, you know best," answered Kling in final surrender. "Ven it comes to money, I know. You go 'long, little Beesvings. I mind de shop."

"And I'll take Fudge," the child cried, "and we'll stop at Gramercy Park."

Fudge was out first, scampering down the street and back again before they had well closed the door, and Masie was as restless. "Oh, I'm just as happy as I can be, Uncle Felix. You are always so good. I never

had any one to walk with until you came, except old Aunty Gossberger, and she never let me look at anything."

Days in June—joyous days with all nature brimful with laughter—days when the air is a caress, the sky a film of pearl and silver, and the eager mob of bud, blossom, and leaf, having burst their bonds, are flaunting their glories, days like these are always to be remembered the world over. But June days about Gramercy Park are to be marked in big Red Letters upon the calendar of the year. For in Gramercy Park the almanac goes to pieces.

Everything is ahead of time. When little counterpanes of snow are still covering the baby crocuses away off in Central Park, down in Gramercy their pink and yellow heads are popping up all over the enclosure. When the big trees in Union Square are stretching their bare arms, making ready to throw off the winter's sleep, every tiny branch in Gramercy is wide awake and tingling with new life. When countless dry roots in Madison Square are still slumbering under their blankets of straw, dreading the hour when they must get up and go to work, hundreds of tender green fingers in Gramercy are thrust out to the kindly sun, pleading for a chance to be up and doing.

And the race keeps up, Gramercy still ahead, until the goal of summer is won, and every blessed thing that could have burst into bloom has settled down to enjoy the siesta of the hot season.

Masie was never tired of watching these changes,

her wonder and delight increasing as the season progressed.

In the earlier weeks there had been nothing but flower-beds covered with unsightly clods, muffled shrubs, and bandaged vines. Then had come a blaze of tulips, exhausting the palette. And then, but a short time before—it seemed only yesterday—every stretch of brown grass had lost its dull tints in a coat of fresh paint, on which the benches, newly scrubbed, were set, and each foot of gravelled walks had been raked and made ready for the little tots in new straw hats who were then trundling their hoops and would soon be chasing their first butterflies.

And now, on this lovely June morning, summer had come—*real summer*—for a mob of merry roses were swarming up a trellis in a mad climb to reach its top, the highest blossom waving its petals in triumph.

Felix waited until she had taken it all in, her face pressed between the bars (only the privileged possessing a key are admitted to the gardens within), Fudge scampering up and down, wild to get at the two gray squirrels, which some vandal has since stolen, and then, remembering his promise to Ganger, he called her to him and continued his walk.

But her morning outing was not over. He must take her to the marble-cutter's yard, filled with all sorts of statues, urns, benches, and columns, and show her again the ruts and grooves cut in the big stone well-head, and tell her once more the story of how it had stood in an old palace in Venice, where the streets were

all water and everybody went visiting in boats. And then she must stop at the florist's to see whether he had any new ferns in his window, and have Felix again explain the difference between the big and little ferns and why the palms had such long leaves.

She was ready now for her visit to the two old painters, but this time Felix lingered. He had caught sight of a garden wall in the rear of an old house, and with his hand in hers had crossed the street to study it the closer. The wall was surmounted by a solid, wrought-iron railing into which some fifty years or more ago a gardener had twisted the tendrils of a wistaria. The iron had cut deep, and so inseparable was the embrace that human skill could not pull them apart without destroying them both.

As he reached the sidewalk and got a clearer view of the vine, tracing the weave of its interlaced branches and tendrils, Masie noticed that he stopped suddenly and for a moment looked away, lost in deep thought. She caught, too, the shadow that sometimes settled on his face, one she had seen before and wondered over. But although her hand was still in his, she kept silent until he spoke.

"Look, dear Masie," he said at last, drawing her to him, "see what happens to those who are forced into traps! It was the big knot that held it back! And yet it grew on!"

Masie looked up into his thoughtful face. "Do you think the iron hurts it, Uncle Felix?" she asked with a sigh.

"I shouldn't wonder; it would me," he faltered.

"But it wasn't the vine's fault, was it?"

"Perhaps not. Maybe when it was planted nobody looked after it, nor cared what might happen when it grew up. Poor wistaria! Come along, darling!"

At last they turned into 10th Street, Fudge scurrying ahead to the very door of the grim building, where a final dash brought him to Ganger's, his nose having sniffed at every threshold they passed and into every crack and corner of the three flights of stairs.

Felix's own nostrils were now dilating with pleasure. The odor of varnish and turpentine had brought back some old memories—as perfumes do for us all. A crumpled glove, a bunch of withered roses, the salt breath of an outlying marsh, are often but so many fairy wands reviving comedies and tragedies on which the curtains of forgetfulness have been rung down these many years.

Something in the aroma of the place was recalling kindred spirits across the sea, when the door was swung wide and Ganger in a big, hearty voice, cried:

"Mr. O'Day, is it? Oh, I am glad! And that dear child, and— Hello! who invited you, you restless little devil of a dog? Come in, all of you! I've a model, but she doesn't care and neither do I. And this, Mr. O'Day, is my old friend, Sam Dogger—and he's no relation of yours, you imp!"—with a bob of his grizzled head at Fudge— "He's a landscape-painter and a good one—one of those Hudson River fellows—and would be a

fine one if he would stick to it. Give me that hat and coat, my chick-a-biddy, and I'll hang them up. And now here's a chair for you, Mr. O'Day, and please get into it—and there's a jar full of tobacco, and if you haven't got a pipe of your own you'll find a whole lot of corncobs on the mantelpiece and you can help yourself."

O'Day had stood smiling at the painter, Masie's hand fast in his, Fudge tiptoeing softly about, divided between a sense of the strangeness of the place and a certainty of mice behind the canvases. Felix knew the old fellow's kind, and recognized the note of attempted gayety in the voice—the bravado of the poor putting their best, sometimes their only, foot foremost.

"No, I won't sit down—not yet," he answered pleasantly; "I will look around, if you will let me, and I will try one of your pipes before I begin. What a jolly place you have here! Don't move"—this to the model, a slip of a girl, her eyes muffled in a lace veil, one of Ganger's Oriental costumes about her shoulders—"I am quite at home, my dear, and if you have been a model any length of time you will know exactly what that means."

"Oh, she's my Fatima," exclaimed Ganger. "Her real name is Jane Hoggson, and her mother does my washing, but I call her Fatima for short. She can stop work for the day. Get down off the platform, Jane Hoggson, and talk to this dear little girl. You see, Mr. O'Day, now that the art of the country has gone to the devil and nobody wants my masterpieces, I

have become an Eastern painter, fresh from Cairo, where I have lived for half a century—principally on Turkish paste and pressed figs. My specialty at present—they are all over my walls, as you can see—is dancing-girls in silk tights or without them, just as the tobacco shops prefer. I also do sheiks, muffled to their eyebrows in bath towels, and with scimitars—like that one above the mantel. And very profitable, too; *most* profitable, my dear sir. I get twenty dollars for a real odalisk and fifteen for a bashi-bazouk. I can do one about every other day, and I sell one about every other month. As for Sam Dogger here—Sam, what is your specialty? I said landscapes, Sam, when Mr. O'Day came in, but you may have changed since we have been talking."

The wizened old gentleman thus addressed sidled nearer. He was ten years younger than Ganger, but his thin, bloodless hands, watery eyes, their lids edged with red, and bald head covered by a black velvet skull-cap made him look that much older.

"Nat talks too much, Mr. O'Day," he piped in a high-keyed voice. "I often tell Nat that he's got a loose hinge in his mouth, and he ought to screw it tight or it will choke him some day when he isn't watching. He! He!" And a wheezy laugh filled the room.

"Shut up, you old sardine! You don't talk enough. If you did you'd get along better. I'll tell you, Mr. O'Day, what Sam does. Sam's a patcher-up—a 'puttier.' That's what he is. Sam can get more quality out of a piece of sandpaper, a pot of varnish, and a

little glue than any man in the business. If you don't believe it, just bring in a fake Romney, or a Gainsborough, or some old Spanish or Italian daub with the corners knocked off where the signature once was, or a scrape down half a cheek, or some smear of a head, with half the canvas bare, and put Sam to work on it, and in a week or less out it comes just as it left the master's easel—'Found by his widow after his death' or 'The property of an English nobleman on whose walls it has hung for two centuries.' By thunder! isn't it beautiful?" He chuckled. "Wonderful how these bullfrogs of connoisseurs swallow the dealers' flies! And here am I, who can paint any blamed thing from a hen-coop to a battle scene, doing signs for tobacco shops; and there is Sam, who can do Corots and Rousseaus and Daubignys by the yard, obliged to stick to a varnish pot and a scraper! Damnable, isn't it? But we don't growl, do we, Sammy? When Sammy has anything left over, he brings half of it down to me—he lives on the floor above—and when I get a little ahead and Sammy is behind, I send it up to him. We are the Siamese twins, Sammy and I, aren't we, Sam? Where are you, anyway? Oh, he's after the dog, I see, moving the canvases so the little beggar won't run a thumb-tack in his paw. Sam can no more resist a dog, my dear Mr. O'Day, than a drunkard can a rum-mill, can you, Sam?"

"At it again, are you, Nat?" wheezed the wizened old gentleman, dusting his fingers as he reappeared from behind the canvases, his watery eyes edged with a

deeper red, due to his exertions. "Don't pay any attention to him, Mr. O'Day. What he says isn't half true, and the half that is true isn't worth listening to. Now tell me about that frame he's ordered. He don't want it, and I've told him so. If you are willing to lend it to him, he'll pay you for it when the picture is sold, which will never be, and by that time he'll——"

"Dry up, you old varnish pot!" shouted Ganger. "How do you know I won't pay for it?"

"Because your picture will never be hung—that's why!"

"Mr. Ganger did not want to buy it," broke in Felix, between puffs from one of his host's corn-cob pipes. "He wanted to exchange something for it—'swap' he called it."

"Oh, well," wheezed Sam, "that's another thing. What were you going to give him in return, Nat? Careful, now—there's not much left."

"Oh, maybe some old stuff, Sammy. Move along, you blessed little child—and you, too, Jane Hoggson! You're sitting on my Venetian wedding-chest—real, too! I bought it forty years ago in Padua. There are some old embroideries down in the bottom, or were, unless Sam has been in here while I— Oh, no, here they are! Beg pardon, Sammy, for suspecting you. There—what do you think of these?"

Felix bent over the pile of stuffs, which, under Ganger's continued dumpings, was growing larger every minute—the last to see the light being part of a priest's cope and two chasubles.

"There—that is enough!" said Felix. "This chasuble alone is worth more than the frame. We will put the Florentine frame at ten dollars and the vestment at fifteen. What others have you, Mr. Ganger? There's a great demand for these things when they are good, and these are good. Where did you get them?"

"Worth more than the frame? Holy Moses!" whistled Ganger. "Why, I thought you'd want all there was in the chest! And you say there are people out of a lunatic asylum looking for rags like this?" And he held up one end of the cope.

"Yes, many of them. To me, I must say, they are worth nothing, as I don't like the idea of mixing up church and state. But Mr. Kling's customers do, and if they choose to say their prayers before a chasuble on a priest's back on Sunday and make a sofa cushion of it the next day, that is their affair, not mine. And now, what else? You spoke of some costumes this morning."

"Yes, I did speak of my costumes, but I'm afraid they are too modern for you—I make 'em up myself. Get up, Jane, and let Mr. O'Day see what you've got on!"

Jane jumped to her feet, looking less Oriental than ever, her spangled veil having dropped about her shoulders, her red hair and freckled face now in full view.

"I think her dress is beautiful, Uncle Felix," whispered Masie.

"Do you, sweetheart? Well, then, maybe I might better look again. What else have you in the way of costumes, Mr. Ganger?"

Dogger stepped up. "He hasn't got a single thing worth a cent; he buys these pieces down in Elizabeth Street, out of push-carts, and Jane Hoggson's mother sews them together. But, my deary"—here he laid his hand on Masie's head—"would you like to see some *real ones*, all-gold-and-silver lace—and satin shoes —and big, high bonnets with feathers?"

Masie clapped her hands in answer and began whirling about the room, her way of telling everybody that she was too happy to keep still.

"Well, wait here; I won't be a minute."

"Sam's fallen in love with her, too," muttered Ganger, "and I don't blame him. Come here, you darling, and let me talk to you. Do you know you are the first little girl that's ever been inside this place for ever—and ever and *ever*—so long? Think of that, will you? Not one single little girl since— Oh, well, I just can't remember—it's such an awful long time. Dreadful, isn't it? Hear that old Sam stumbling down-stairs! Now let's see what he brings you."

Dogger's arms were full. "I've a silk dress," he puffed, "and a ruffled petticoat, and a great leghorn hat—and just look at these feathers, and you never saw such a pair of slippers and silk stockings! And now let's try 'em on!"

The child uttered a little scream of delight. "Oh, Uncle Felix! Isn't it lovely? Can't I have them?

Please, Uncle Felix!" she cried, both hands around his shirt collar in supplication.

"Take 'em all, missy," shouted Sam. Then, turning to Felix: "They belonged to an actor who hired half of my studio and left them to pay for his rent, which they didn't do, not by a long chalk, and— Oh, here's another hat—and, oh, such a lovely old cloak! Yes, take 'em all, missy—I'm glad to get rid of 'em—before Nat claps them on Jane and goes in for Puritan maidens and Lady Gay Spankers. Oh, I know you, Nat! I wouldn't trust you out of my sight! Take 'em along, I say." He stopped and turned toward Felix again.

"Couldn't you bring her down here once in a while, Mr. O'Day?" he continued, a strange, pathetic note in his wheezing voice. "Just for ten minutes, you know, when she's out with the dog, or walking with you. Nobody ever comes up these stairs but tramps and book agents—even the models steer clear. It would help a lot if you'd bring her. Wouldn't you like to come, missy? What did you say her name was? Oh, yes—Masie—well, my child, that's not what I'd call you; I'd call you—well, I guess I wouldn't call you anything but just a dear, darling little girl! Yes, that's just what I'd call you. And you are going to let me give them to her, aren't you, Mr. O'Day?"

Felix grasped the old fellow's thin, dry hand in his own strong fingers. For an instant a strange lump in his throat clogged his speech. "Of course, I'll take the costumes, and many thanks for your wish to make the child happy," he answered at last. "I am rather foolish

about Masie myself; and may I tell you, Mr. Dogger, that you are a very fine old gentleman, and that I am delighted to have made your acquaintance, and that, if you will permit me I shall certainly come again?"

Dogger was about to reply when Masie, looking up into the wizened face, cried: "And may I put them on when I like, if I'm very, very—oh, so *very* careful?"

"Yes, you buttercup, and you can wear them full of holes and do anything else you please to them, and I won't care a mite."

And then, with Jane Hoggson's help, he put on Masie's own hat and coat, which Ganger had hung on an easel, and Masie called Fudge from his mouse-hole, and Felix shook hands first with Nat and then with Sam, and last of all with Jane, who looked at him askance out of one eye as she bobbed him half a courtesy. And then everybody went out into the hall and said good-by once more over the banisters, Felix with the bundle under his arm, Masie throwing kisses to the two old gnomes craning their necks over the banisters, Fudge barking every step of the way down the stairs.

CHAPTER VI

The glimpse which Felix had caught of these two poor, unappreciated old men, living contentedly from hand to mouth, gayly propping each other up when one or the other weakened, had strangely affected him. If, as he reasoned, such battered hulks, stranded these many years on the dry sands of incompetency, with no outlook for themselves across the wide sea over which their contemporaries were scudding with all sails set before the wind of success—if these castaways, their past always with them and their hoped-for future forever out of their reach, could laugh and be merry, why should not he carry some of their spirit into his relations with the people among whom his lot was now thrown?

That these people had all been more than good to him, and that he owed them in return something more than common politeness now took possession of his mind. Few such helping hands had ever been held out to him. When they had been, the proffered palm had generally concealed a hidden motive. Hereafter he would try to add what he could of his own to the general fund of good-fellowship and good deeds.

He would continue his nightly search—and he had not missed a single evening—but he would return

earlier, so as to be able to spend an hour reading to Masie before she went to bed, or with his other friends and acquaintances of "The Avenue"—especially with Kitty and John. He had been too unmindful of them, getting back to his lodgings at any hour of the night, either to let himself in by his pass-key—all the lights out and everybody asleep—or to find only Kitty or John, or both, at work over their accounts or waiting up for Mike or Bobby or for one of their wagons detained on some dock. And since Kling had raised his salary, enabling him not only to recover his dressing-case, which then rested on his mantel, but to take his meals wherever he happened to be at the moment—he had seldom dined at home—a great relief in many ways to a man of his tastes.

Kitty, though he did not know it, had demurred and had talked the matter over with John, wondering whether she had neglected his comfort. When she had questioned him, he had settled it with a pat on her shoulders. "Just let me have my way this time, my dear Mrs. Cleary," he had said gently but firmly. "I am a bad boarder and cause you no end of trouble, for I am never on time. And please keep the price as it is, for I don't pay you half enough for all your goodness to me."

Now under the impulse of his new resolution, and rather ashamed of his former attitude in view of all her unremitting attentions, he resumed his place at her table. Nor did he stop here. He taught her to broil a chop over her coal fire by removing the stove

lid—until then they had been fried—and a new way with a rasher of bacon, using the carving-fork instead of a pan. The clearing of the famous coffee-pot with an egg—making the steaming mixture anew whenever wanted instead of letting the dented old pot simmer away all day on the back of the stove—was another innovation, making the evening meal just that much more enjoyable, greatly to the delight of the hostess, who was prouder of her boarder than of any other human being who had come into her life, except John and Bobby.

These renewed intimacies opened his eyes to another phase of the life about him, and he soon found himself growing daily more interested in the sweet family relations of the small household.

"What do I care for what we haven't got," Kitty said to him one night when some economies in the small household were being discussed. "I'm better off than half the women who stop at my door in their carriages. I got two arms, and I can sleep eight hours when I get the chance, and John loves me and so does Bobby and so does my big white horse Jim. There ain't one of them women as knows what it is to work for her man and him to work for her." All the other married couples he had seen had pulled apart, or lived apart—mentally, at least. These two seemed bound together heart and soul.

More than once he contrived to stop at the Studio Building, where both of the old fellows were almost always to be found sitting side by side, and, picking

them up bodily, he had set them down on hard chairs in a rathskeller on Sixth Avenue, where they had all dined together, the old fellows warmed up with two beers apiece. This done, he had escorted them back, seen them safely up-stairs, and returned to his lodgings.

It was after one of these mild diversions that, before going to his room, he pushed open the door of the Clearys' sitting-room with a cheery "May I come in, Mistress Kitty?"

"Oh, but I'm glad to see ye!" was the joyous answer. "I was sayin' to myself: 'Maybe ye'd come in before he went.' Here's Father Cruse I been tellin' ye about—and, Father, here's Mr. O'Day that's livin' wid us."

A full-chested man of forty, in a long black cassock, standing six feet in his stockings, his face alight with the glow of a freshly kindled pleasure, rose from his chair and held out his hand. "The introduction should be quite unnecessary, Mr. O'Day," he exclaimed in the full, sonorous voice of a man accustomed to public speaking. "You seem to have greatly attached these dear people to you, which in itself is enough, for there are none better in my parish."

Felix, who had been looking the speaker over, taking in his thoughtful face, deep black eyes, and more especially the heavy black eyebrows that lay straight above them, felt himself warmed by the hearty greeting and touched by its sincerity. "I agree with you, Father, in your praise of them," he said as he grasped the priest's hand. "They have been everything to me since my sojourn among them. And, if I am not mistaken,

you and I have something else in common. My people are from Limerick."

"And mine from Cork," laughed the priest as he waved his hand toward his empty chair, adding: "Let me move it nearer the table."

"No, I will take my old seat, if you do not mind. Please do not move, Mr. Cleary; I am near enough."

"And are you an importation, Father, like myself?" continued Felix, shifting the rocker for a better view of the priest.

"No. I am only an Irishman by inheritance. I was brought up on the soil, born down in Greenwich village —and a very queer old part of the town it is. Strange to say, there are very few changes along its streets since my boyhood. I found the other day the very slanting cellar door I used to slide on when I was so high! Do you know Greenwich?"

He was sitting upright as he spoke, his hands hidden in the folds of his black cassock, wondering meanwhile what was causing the deep lines on the brow of this high-bred, courteous man, and the anxious look in the deep-set eyes. As priest he had looked into many others, framed in the side window of the confessional—the most wonderful of all schools for studying human nature—but few like those of the man before him; eyes so clear and sincere, yet shadowed by what the priest vaguely felt was some overwhelming sorrow.

"Oh, yes, I know it as I know most of New York," Felix was saying; "it is close to Jefferson Market and full of small houses, where I should think people could

live very cheaply"; adding, with a sigh, "I have walked a great deal about your city," and as suddenly checked himself, as if the mere statement might lead to discussion.

Kitty, who had been darning one of John's gray yarn stockings—the needle was still between her thumb and forefinger—leaned forward. "That's the matter with him, Father, and he'll never be happy until he stops it," she cried. "He don't do nothin' but tramp the streets until I think he'd get that tired he'd go to sleep standin' up."

Felix turned toward her. "And why not, Mrs. Cleary?" he asked with a smile. "How can I learn anything about this great metropolis unless I see it for myself?"

"But it's all Sunday and every night! I get that worried about ye sometimes, I'm ready to cry. And ye won't listen to a thing I say! I been waitin' for Father Cruse to get hold of ye, and I'm goin' to say what's in my mind." Here she looked appealingly to the priest. "Now, ye just talk to him, Father, won't ye, please?"

The priest, laughing heartily, raised his protesting hands toward her. "If he fails to heed you, Mrs. Cleary, he certainly won't listen to me. What do you say for yourself, Mr. O'Day?"

Felix twisted his head until he could address his words more directly to his hostess. "Please keep on scolding me, my dear Mrs. Cleary. I love to hear you. But there is Father Cruse, why not sympathize with

him? He tramps to some purpose. I am only the Wandering Jew, who does it for exercise."

Kitty held the point of the darning-needle straight out toward Felix. "But why must you do it Sundays, Mr. O'Day? That's what I want to know."

"But Sunday is my holiday."

"Yes, and there's early mass. Ye'd think he'd come, wouldn't ye, Father?"

One of O'Day's low, murmuring laughs, that always sounded as if he had grown unaccustomed to letting the whole of it pass his lips, filtered through the room.

"You see what a heathen I am, Father," he exclaimed. "But I am going to turn over a new leaf. I shall honor myself by visiting St. Barnabas's some day very soon, and shall sit in the front pew—or, perhaps, in yours, Mrs. Cleary, if you will let me—now that I know who officiates," and he inclined his head graciously toward the priest. "I hope the service is not always in the morning!"

"Oh, no, we have a service very often at night, sometimes at eight o'clock."

"And how long does that last?"

"Perhaps an hour."

"And so if I should come at eight and wait until you are free, you could give me, perhaps, another hour of yourself?"

"Yes, and with the greatest pleasure. But why at those hours?" asked the priest with some curiosity.

"Because I am very busy at other times. But I want to be quite frank. If I come, it will not be because I

need your service, but because I shall want to see *you*. Your church is not my church, and never has been, but your people—especially your priests—have always had my admiration and respect. I have known many of your brethren in my time. One in particular, who is now very old—a dear abbé, living in Paris. Heaven is made up of just such saints."

The priest clasped his hands together. "We have many such, sir," he replied solemnly. The acknowledgment came reverently, with a gleam that shone from under the heavy brows.

Felix caught its brilliance, and the sense of a certain bigness in the man passed through him. He had been prepared for his quiet, well-bred dignity. All the priests he had known were thoroughbreds in their manner and bearing; their self-imposed restraint, self-effacement, absence of all unnecessary gesture, and modulated voices had made them so; but the warmth of this one's underlying nature was as unexpected as it was pleasurable.

"Yes, you have many such," O'Day repeated simply after a slight pause during which his thoughts seemed to have wandered afar. "And now tell me," he asked, rousing himself to renewed interest, "where your work lies—your real work, I mean. The mass is your rest."

The priest turned quickly. He wondered if there were a purpose behind the question. "Oh, among my people," he answered, the slow, even, non-committal tones belying the eagerness of his gesture.

"Yes, I know; but go on. This is a great city—greater than I had ever supposed—greater, in many ways, than London. The luxury and waste are appalling; the misery is more appalling still. What sort of men and women do you put your hands on?"

"Here are some of them," answered the priest, his forefinger pointing to Kitty and John.

"We could all of us do without churches and priests," ventured Felix, his eyes kindling, "if your parishioners were as good as these dear people."

"Well, there's Bobby," laughed the priest, his face turned toward the boy, who was sound asleep in his chair, Toodles, the door-mat of a dog, sprawled at his feet.

"And are there no others, Father Cruse?"

The priest, now convinced of a hidden meaning in the insistent tones, grew suddenly grave, and laid his hand on O'Day's knee. "Come and see me some time, and I will tell you. My district runs from Fifth Avenue to the East River, from the homes of the rich to the haunts of the poor, and there is no form of vice and no depth of suffering the world over that does not knock daily at my study door. Do not let us talk about it here. Perhaps some day we may work together, if you are willing."

Kitty, who had been listening, her heart throbbing with pride over Felix, who had held his own with her beloved priest, and still fearing that the talk would lead away from what was uppermost in her mind—O'Day's welfare—now sprang from her chair before Felix could

reply. "Of course he'll come, Father, once he's seen ye."

"Yes, I will," answered Felix cordially. "And it will not be very long either, Father. And now I must say good night. It has been a real pleasure to meet you. You have been a most kindly grindstone to a very dull and useless knife, and I am greatly sharpened up. After all, I think we both agree that it is rather difficult to keep anything bright very long unless you rub it against something still brighter and keener. Thank you again, Father," and with a pat of his fingers on Kitty's shoulder as he passed, and a good night to John, he left the room on his way to his chamber above.

Kitty waited until the sound of O'Day's footsteps told her that he had reached the top of the stairs and then turned to the priest. "Well, what do ye think of him? Have I told ye too much? Did ye ever know the beat of a man like that, livin' in a place like this and eatin' at my table, and never a word of complaint out o' him, and everybody lovin' him the moment they clap their two eyes on him?"

The priest made no immediate answer. For some seconds he gazed into the fire, then looked at John as if about to seek some further enlightenment, but changing his mind faced Kitty. "Is his mail sent here?"

"What? His letters?"

"Yes."

"He don't have any—not one since he's been wid us."

"Anybody come to see him?"

"Niver a soul."

The priest ruminated for a moment more, and then said slowly, as if his mind were made up: "It does not matter; somebody or something has hurt him, and he has gone off to die by himself. In the old days such men sought the monasteries; to-day they try to lose themselves in the crowd."

Again he ruminated, the delicate antennæ of his hands meeting each other at the tips.

"A most extraordinary case," he said at last. "No malice, no bitterness—yet eating his heart out. Pitiful, really; and the worst thing about it is that you can't help him, for his secret will die with him. Bring him to me sometime, and let me know before you come so I may be at home."

"You don't think there's anything crooked about him, Father, do you?" said John, who had sat tilted back against the wall and now brought the front legs of his chair to the floor with a bang.

"What do you mean by crooked, John?" asked the priest.

"Well, he blew in here from nowheres, bringin' a couple of trunks and a hat-box, and not much in 'em, from what Kitty says. And he might blow out again some fine night, leavin' his own full of bricks, carting off instead some I keep on storage for my customers, full of God knows what!—but somethin' that's worth money, or they wouldn't have me take care of 'em. There ain't nothin' to prevent him, for he's got the run of the place day and night. And Kitty's that dead stuck on him she'll believe anything he says."

Kitty wheeled around in her seat, her big strong fist tightly clinched. "Hold your tongue, John Cleary!" she cried indignantly. "I'd knock any man down—I don't care how big he was—that would be a-sayin' that of ye without somethin' to back it up, and that's what'll happen to ye if ye don't mend your manners. Can't ye see, Father, that Mr. Felix O'Day is the real thing, and no sham about him? I do, and Kling does, and so does that darlin' Masie, and every man, woman, and child around here that can get their hands on him or a word wid him. Shame on ye, John! Tell him so, Father Cruse!"

The priest kept silent, waiting until the slight family squall—never very long nor serious between John and Kitty—had spent itself.

"Well, I'm not sayin' anything against Mr. O'Day, Kitty," broke in John. "I'm only askin' for information. What do you think of him, Father? What's he up to, anyhow? There ain't any of 'em can fool ye. I don't want to watch him—I ain't got no time—and I won't if he's all right."

The priest rose from his chair and stood looking down at Kitty, his hands clasped behind his back. "You believe in him, do you not?"

"I do—up to the handle—and I don't care who knows it!"

"Then I would not worry, John Cleary, if I were you."

"Well, what does she know about it, Father?"

"What every good woman always knows about every good man. And now I must go."

CHAPTER VII

As was to be expected, Kitty's first words to O'Day on the following morning related to his meeting with Father Cruse. "Ye'll not find a better man anywhere," she had said to him, "and there ain't a trouble he can't cure."

Felix had smiled at her enthusiasm for her idol and comforted her by saying that it had given him distinct pleasure to meet him, adding: "A big man with a big soul, that priest of yours, Mistress Kitty. I begin to see now why you and your husband lead such human lives. Yes—a fine man."

But no closer intimacy ensued, nor did he pursue the acquaintance—not even on the following Sunday, when Kitty urged him, almost to importunity, to go and hear the Father say mass. He was not ready as yet, he said to himself, for friendships among men of his own intellectual caliber. In the future he might decide otherwise. For the present, at least, he meant to find whatever peace and comfort he could among the simple people immediately around him—meagrely educated, often strangely narrow-minded, but possessing qualities which every day aroused in him a profounder admiration.

With the quick discernment of the man of the world —one to whom many climes and many people were

familiar—he had begun to discover for himself that this great middle class was really the backbone of the whole civil structure about him, its self-restraint, sanity, and cleanliness marking the normal in the tide-gauge of the city's activities; the hysteria of the rich and the despair of the poor being the two extremes.

Here, as he repeatedly observed, were men absorbed in their several humble occupations, proud of their successes, helpful of those who fell by the wayside, good citizens and good friends, honest in their business relations, each one going about his appointed task and leaving the other fellow unmolested in his. Here, too, were women, good mothers to their children and good wives to their husbands, untiring helpmates, regarding their responsibilities as mutual, and untroubled as yet by thoughts of their own individual identities or what their respective husbands owed to them.

This was why, instead of renewing his acquaintance with Father Cruse, he preferred to halt for a few minutes' talk with some one of Kitty's neighbors —it might be the liveryman next door who had been forty years on the Avenue, or one of the shopkeepers near by, most of whom were welcome to Kitty's sitting-room and kitchen, and all of whom had shared her coffee. Or it might be that he would call at Digwell's, whose undertaker's shop was across the way and whose door was always open, the gas burning as befitted one liable to be called upon at any hour of the day or night; or perhaps he would pass the time of day with Pestler, the druggist; or give ten minutes

to Porterfield, listening to his talk about the growing prices of meat.

Had you asked his former associates why a man of O'Day's intelligence should have cultivated the acquaintance of an undertaker like Digwell, for instance, whose face was a tombstone, his movements when on duty those of a crow stepping across wet places in a cornfield, they would have shaken their heads in disparaging wonder. Had you asked Felix he would have answered with a smile: "Why to hear Digwell laugh!" And then, warming to his subject, he would have told you what a very jolly person Digwell really was, if you were fortunate enough to find him unoccupied in his private den, way back in the rear of his shop. How he had entertained him by the hour with anecdotes of his early life when he was captain of a baseball team, and what fun he had gotten out of it, and did still, when he could sneak away to help pack the benches.

Had you inquired about Pestler, the druggist, there would have followed some such reply as: "Pestler? Did you say? Because Pestler is one of the most surprising men I know. He has kept that same shop, he tells me, for twenty-two years. Of course, he knows only a very little about drugs—just enough to keep him out of the hands of the police—but then none of you are aware, perhaps, that Pestler is also a student? You might think, when you saw only the top of his fuzzy, half-bald head sticking up above the wooden partition, that he was putting up a prescription, but you

would be wrong. What he is really doing, with the aid of his microscope, is dissecting bugs, and pasting them on glass slides for use in the public schools. And he plays the violin—and very well, too! He often entertains me with his music."

Sanderson, the florist, was another denizen who interested him. To look at Sanderson tying ribbons on funeral wreaths, no one would ever have supposed that there was rarely a first night at the opera at which he was not present, paying for his ticket, too, and rather despising Pestler, who got his theatre tickets free because he allowed the managers the use of his windows for advertisements. Felix forgave even his frozen roses whenever the Scotchman, having found a sympathetic listener, launched out upon his earlier experiences among opera stars, especially his acquaintance with Patti, whom he had known before she became great and whom he always spoke of as devotees do of the Madonna—with bated breath and a sigh of despair that he would never hear her again.

Then, too, there was Codman. O'Day was always enthusiastic over Codman. "I have taken a great fancy to that fishmonger, and a fine fellow he is," he said one night to Kitty and John. "His shop was shut when I first called on him, but he was good enough to open it at my knock, and I have just spent half an hour, and a very delightful half-hour, watching him handle the sea food, as he calls it, in his big refrigerator. I got a look, too, at his chest and his arms, and at his pretty wife and children. She is really the best

type of the two. American, you say, both of them, and a fine pair they are, and he tells me he pulled a surf-boat in your coast-guard when he was a lad of twenty, then took up fishing, and then went into Fulton Market, helping at a stall, and now he is up here with two delivery-wagons and four assistants and is a member of a fish union, whatever that is. It's astonishing! And yet I have met him many a time pushing his baby-carriage around the block."

"Yes," Kitty answered, putting on a shovel of coal, "and I'll lay ye a wager, Mr. O'Day, that Polly Codman will be drivin' through Central Park in her carriage before five years is out; and she deserves it, for there ain't a finer woman from here to the Battery."

"I am quite sure of it, Mistress Kitty. That is where the American comes in—or, perhaps it is the New Yorker. I have not been here long enough to find out."

Of all these neighbors, however, it was Timothy Kelsey, the hunchback, largely because of his misfortunes and especially because of his vivid contrast to all the others, who appealed to him most. Tim, as has been said, kept the second-hand book-shop, half-way down the block on the opposite side of the street. He was but a year or two older than O'Day, but you would never have supposed it had Tim not told you—and not then unless you had looked close and followed the lines of care deep cut in his face and the wrinkles that crowded close to his deep, hollowed-out eyes. When he was a boy of two, his sister, a girl of six, had let him drop

to the sidewalk, and he had never since straightened his back. The customary outlets by which fully equipped men earn their living having been denied Tim, he had passed his boyhood days in one of the small, down-town libraries, cataloguing the books. With this came the opportunity to attend the auction sales when some rare volume was to be bid for, he representing the library. A small shop of his own followed in the lower part of the town, and then the one a little below Kling's, where he lived alone with only a caretaker to look after his wants.

Kelsey had arrived one morning shortly after Felix had entered Kling's service, carrying a heavily bound book which he laid on a glass case under Otto's nose. "Take a look at it, Otto," he said, after pausing a moment to get his breath, the volume being heavy. "There is more brass than leather on the outside, and more paint than text on the inside. I have two others from the same collection. It is in your line rather than in mine, I take it. What do you think of it? Could you sell it?"

Kling dropped his glasses from his forehead to the bridge of his flat nose. "Vell! Dot is a funny-looking book, Tim. Dot is awful old, you know."

"Yes, seventeenth century, I think," replied Tim.

"Vot you tink, Mr. O'Day? Ain't dot a k'veer book? Oh, you don't have met my new clerk, have you, Tim? Vell dot's funny, for he lives over at Kitty's. Vell, dis is him—Mr. Felix O'Day. Tim Kelsey is an olt friend of mine, Mr. O'Day. You must have seen dot k'veer

shop vich falls down into de cellar from de sidevalk—vell, dat's Tim's."

Felix smiled good-naturedly, bowed to Kelsey, and taking the huge, brass-bound volume in his hands, passed his fingers gently across the leather and then over the heavy clamps, turning the book to the light of the window so as to examine the chasing the closer. Tim, who had been watching him, remarked the ease with which he handled the volume and the care with which he ran his eye along the edges of the inside of the back before paying the slightest attention to the quality of the vellum or to the title-page.

"Did you say you thought it was seventeenth century, Mr. Kelsey?" Felix asked thoughtfully.

"Yes, I should say so."

"I would put it somewhat earlier. The binding is wholly tool-work, much older than the brasses, which, I think, have been renewed—at least the clamps—certainly one of them is of a later period. The vellum and the illuminated text"—again he scrutinized the title-page, this time turning a few of the inside leaves—"is before Gutenberg's time. Handwork, of course, by some old monk. Very curious and very interesting. And you say there are two others like this one?"

The hunchback, whose big, shaggy head reached but a very little above the case over which the colloquy was taking place, stretched himself upon his toes as if to see Felix the better. "You seem to know something of books, sir," he remarked in a surprised tone. "May I ask where you picked it up?"

Again Felix smiled, a curious expression lurking around his thin lips—a way with him when he intended to be non-committal. He was now more interested in the speaker than in the object before him, especially in the big dome head and sunken eyes, shaded by bushy eyebrows, the only feature of the man which seemed to have had a chance to grow to its normal size. He had caught, too, a certain high-pitched note, one of suffering running through the hunchback's speech—often discernible in those who have been robbed of their full physical strength and completeness.

"Oh, I don't know, Mr. Kelsey. There are, as you know, but few old clamp books like this in existence. There are some in the Bibliothèque in Paris, and a good many in Spain. I remember handling one some years ago in Cordova. When you have seen a fine example you are not apt to forget it. Why do you sell it?"

Kelsey settled down upon his heels—the upper half of his misshapen body telescoping the lower—and shoved both hands into his pockets. "I did not come here to sell it"—there was a touch of irony in his voice—"I came to find out whether Kling could sell it. Do you think *you* could?"

"I might, or I might not. Only a few people about here, so I understand, can appreciate this sort of thing."

"What is it worth?" He was still eying him closely. People who praised his things were those who never wanted to buy.

"Not very much," replied Felix.

"Oh, but I thought you said it was very rare?"

"So it is—almost too rare—and almost too old. If it had been done fifty or more years later, on one of Gutenberg's presses, Quaritch might give you two thousand pounds for it. Hand-work—which ought really to be more valuable than machine-work—is worth pence, where the other sells for pounds. One of Gutenberg's Bibles sold here a year ago for three thousand guineas, so I am told. What are the other two like?"

"No difference—a clasp is gone from one. The other is—" He stopped, his mien suddenly changing to one of marked respect, even to one of awe. "Will you do me a favor, sir?"

"With pleasure"—again the same quiet smile. He had read the financial workings of the bookseller's mind with infinite amusement and decided to see more of him. "What can I do for you?"

"I want you to come over with me to my shop. You won't object, will you, Otto? I won't keep him a minute."

"Let me come a little later, sir, say about nine o'clock. I have work here until six and an engagement, which is important, until nine. You are open as late as that?"

"Oh, I am always open, or can be," Kelsey answered. "What would I shut up shop for except to keep out the rats—human and otherwise? I live in my place, and, as I live alone, nobody ever disturbs me—nobody I want to see—and I do want you, and want you very

much. Well, then, come at nine, and if the blinds are up, ring the bell." And so the acquaintance began.

And yet, interesting as he found these diversions with his neighbors, there were moments when, despite his determination to be cheerful and to add his quota to the general fund of good-fellowship, he had to summon all his courage to prevent his spirit sinking to its lowest ebb. It was then he would turn to the thing that lay nearest to hand, his work—work often so irksome to him that, but for his sense both of obligation and of justice to his employer and his love for Masie, he would have abandoned it altogether.

A possible relief came when through the protests of a customer he had begun to realize the clearer Kling's deficiencies and had, in consequence, cast about for some plan of helping him to do a larger and more remunerative business.

Several ways by which this could be accomplished were outlined in his mind. The disorder everywhere apparent in the shop should first come to an end. The present chaos of tables, chairs, bureaus, and sideboards, heaped higgledy-piggledy one upon the other—the customers edging their way between lanes of dusty furniture—must next be abolished. So must the jumble of glass, china, curios, and lamps. This completed, color and form would be considered, each taking its proper place in the general scheme.

To accomplish these results, all the unsalable, useless, and ugly furniture taking up valuable space must be

carted away to some auction room and sold for what it would bring. Light, air, and much-needed room would then follow, and prices advanced to make up for the loss on the "rattletrap" and the "rickety." Stuffs which had been poked away in worthless bureau drawers for years, as being too ragged even to show, were next to be hauled out, patched, and darned, and then hung on the bare white walls, concealing the dirt and the cracks.

And these improvements, strange to say—Kling being as obstinate as the usual Dutch cabinetmaker, and as set in his ways—were finally carried out; slowly at first, and with a rush later when every customer who entered the door began by complimenting Otto on the improvement. Soon the sales increased to such an extent and the stock became so depleted that Kling was obliged to look around for articles of a better and higher grade to take its place.

At this juncture a happy and unforeseen accident came to his aid. A bric-à-brac dealer with a shop in Jersey City filled with some very good English and Italian patterns and a fine assortment of European gatherings—most of them rare, and all of them good—fell ill and was ordered to Colorado for his health. His wife had insisted on going with him, and thus the whole concern, including its good-will—worthless to Kling—was offered to him at half its value.

O'Day spent the entire morning crawling in and out of the interstices of the choked-up Jersey City shop; Masie, as his valuable assistant, propped up with Fudge

on a big table until he had finished. The next day the bargain was made. Mike, Bobby, the two Dutchies, and both Kitty's teams were then called in and the transfer began.

It was when this collection of things really worth having were being moved into their new home under Felix's personal direction that Masie announced to him an important event. They were on the second floor at the time, overlooking Hans and Mike, who had just brought up-stairs the first of the purchase, a huge, high-backed gilt chair, stately in its proportions—Spanish, Felix thought—with a few renovations about the arms and back, but a good specimen withal. The chair had evidently excited her imagination, reminding her, perhaps, of some of the pictures in Tim Kelsey's fairy books, for after looking at it for a moment she began clapping her hands and whirling about the room.

"I've thought of such a lovely thing, Uncle Felix! Let's play kings and queens! I will sit in this chair and will dress Fudge up like a page and everybody will come up and courtesy, or I will be the fairy princess and you will be my beauty prince, and——"

Felix, who was holding up the heavy end of a piece of tapestry while the two men were clearing a place for it behind the chair, called out, "When's all this to happen, Tootcoms?"—one of his pet names; he had a dozen of them.

"Next Saturday."

"Why next Saturday?"

"Because then I'm eleven years old, and you know that a great many fairy princesses are never any older."

Down went the tapestry. "Your birthday! You blessed little angel! Eleven years old! My goodness, how time flies! Pretty soon you will be in long dresses, with your hair in a knot on the top of your head. You never told me a word about it!"

"No, but I do now. And I am just going to have a party—a real party. And I am going to invite everybody, all the girls I know and all the boys and all the old people."

Felix had her beside him now, her fresh young cheek against his. "You don't tell me! Well! I never heard anything like it! And what will your father say?"

Her face fell. "Don't let's tell him! Let's have a surprise!"

Felix shook his head. "I am afraid we could never do that, unless we locked him up in the cellar and did not give him a thing to eat until everything was ready. Oh, just think how he would beg for mercy!"

Masie rubbed her cheek up and down that of Felix in disapproval. "No, you wouldn't be so mean to poor Popsy."

"Well, then, suppose—suppose—" and he held her teasingly from him to note the effect of his words—"suppose we make him go away—way off somewhere, to buy something—so far away that he could not come back until the next day. How would that do?"

"No, that won't do—not a little bit! I've got a better plan. You go right down-stairs this minute and

tell him it's all fixed, and that I'm going out this very afternoon to invite everybody myself."

Felix made a wry face. "Suppose he sends me about my business?"

"He won't. He thinks you are the most *wonderful* man in the world—he told Mr. Kelsey so; I heard him—and he won't refuse you anything—oh, Uncle Felix"—both arms were around his neck now, always her last argument—"I do so want a birthday party and I want it right here in this room."

Felix smoothed back the hair from her pleading eyes and kissed her tenderly on the forehead. For a moment there was silence between them, he continuing to smooth back her hair, she cuddling the tighter, her usual way. She always let him think a while and it always came out right. But he had made up his mind. It had been years since a birthday of his own had been celebrated; nor had he ever helped, so far as he could recollect, to celebrate the birthday of any child. Yes, Masie should have her birthday, if he could bring it about, and it should be the happiest of all her life.

Suddenly he rose, releasing his neck from her grasp, and ran his eyes around the almost bare interior—the big chair being the only article, so far, in place. "It will make a grand banquet hall, Masie," he said, as if speaking more to himself than to her. "Let me see!" He walked half the length of the floor and began studying the walls and the bare rafters of the ceiling. These last had once been yellow-washed, age and dust having

turned the kalsomine to an old-gold tint, reminding him of a ceiling belonging to a Venetian palace.

"Yes," he continued, with the same abstracted air, his head upturned, "there's a good place for hanging a big lamp, if there is one in the new lot, and there are spots where I can hang twenty or more smaller ones. I will cover the side walls with stuffs and embroideries and put those long Italian settees against—yes, Tweety-kins, it will come out all right. It will make a splendid banquet hall! And after the party we will leave it just so. Fine, my child! And I have an idea, too—a brilliant idea. Hans, ask Mr. Kling to be good enough to come up here!"

With the surrender of her Uncle Felix, Masie resumed her spinning around the room and kept it up until the father's bald head showed clear above the top of the stairs.

"Masie has had one brilliant idea, Mr. Kling, and I have another. I will tell you mine first." It was wonderful how thoroughly he understood the Dutchman.

"Vell, vot is it?" Otto had sniffed something unusual in the atmosphere and was on the defensive. When there was only one to deal with he sometimes had his way; never when they were leagued together.

"I propose," continued O'Day, "to turn this whole floor into the sort of a room one could live in—like many of the great halls I have seen abroad—and I think we have enough material to make a success of it, plenty of space in which to put everything where it

belongs. Leave that big chair where I have placed it, throw some rugs on the floor, nail the stuffs and tapestries to the walls, fasten the brackets and sconces and appliques on top of them, filled with candles, and hang the lanterns and church lamps to the rafters. When I finish with it, you will have a room to which your customers will flock."

Kling, bewildered, followed the play of O'Day's fingers in the air as if he were already placing the ornaments and hangings with which his mind was filled.

"Vell, vot ve do vid de stuff dot's comin'—all dem sideboards and chairs and de pig tables? Ve ain't got de space."

"Half of them will go here, and the balance we will pile away on the top floor. When these are sold then we'll bring down the others—always keeping up the character of the room. That is my idea. What do you think of it?"

The shopkeeper hesitated, his fat features twisted in calculation. Every move of his new salesman had brought him in double his money. The placing of his goods so that a customer would be compelled to crawl over a table in order to see whether a chair had three whole legs or two, dust and darkness helping, had always seemed to him one of the tricks of the trade and not to be abandoned lightly.

"You mean dot ve valk 'round loose in de middle, and everyting is shoved back de vall behind, so you can see it all over?"

Felix smothered a smile. "Certainly, why not?"

"Vell, Mr. O'Day, I don't know." Then, noticing the quickly drawn brows of his clerk's face and the shadow of disappointment: "Of course, ve can try it, and if it don't vork ve do it over, don't ve?"

Masie slipped her arm through O'Day's and began a joyous tattoo with her foot. She knew now that Felix had carried the day.

"And now for Masie's idea, Mr. Kling."

"Oh, dere is someting else, eh? I tought dere vould be ven you puts your two noddles togedder—Vell, vot is dot all about, eh?"

"She is to have a birthday. She will be eleven years old next Saturday."

"By Jeminy, yes, dot's so! I forgot dot, Masie. Yes, it comes on de tventy-fust. Vy you don't tell me before, little Beesvings?"

"Yes, next Saturday; only four days off," continued Felix, forging ahead to avoid any side-tracking of his main theme. "And what are you going to do for her? Not many more of them before she will be out of the window like a bird, and off with somebody else."

Otto ruminated. He loved his daughter, even if he did sometimes forget her very existence. "Oh, I don't know. I guess ve buy her sometings putty—vot you like to have, Beesvings? Or maybe you like to go to de teater vid Auntie Gossburger. I get de tickets."

The child disengaged her hand from O'Day's arm, pushed back her hair and tiptoed to her father. "I want a party, Popsy—a real party," she whispered, tipping his chin back with her fingers, so he could look

at her through his spectacles—not over them, like an ogre.

"Vere you have it?" This came in a bewildered way, as if the pair had the big ballroom at Delmonico's in the back of their heads.

"Here, in this very place," broke in Felix, "after I get it in order."

Kling, gently freeing himself from Masie's hold, stared at his clerk. "Dot vill cost a lot of money, don't it?"

"No, I do not think so."

"Vell, who is coming? De childer all around?"

"Everybody is coming—big, little, and middle-sized," answered Felix. The cat was all out of the bag now.

"Vell, dot's vot I said. You don't can get someting for nodding. You must have blenty to eat and drink."

"No. Some simple refreshment will do—sandwiches, cake, and some ice-cream. I'll take care of that myself, if you'll permit me."

"Vell, now stop a minute vunce—here is anudder idea. Suppose ve make it a Dutch treat—everybody bring sometings. Ve had vun last vinter at Budvick's, de upholsterer, ven he vas married tventy-five years. I give de apples—more as half a peck."

Felix broke into a hearty, ringing laugh—one of the few either Masie or his employer had ever heard escape his lips.

"We will let you off without even the apples this time," he said, when he recovered himself. "They

are not coming to get something to eat this time. I will give them something better."

"And you say everybody is comin'. Who is dot everybody?"

"Just leave it all to me, Mr. Kling. And give yourself no concern. I am going to use everything we have: all our cups and saucers, no matter whether they are Spode, Lowestoft, or Worcester; all the platters, German beer mugs, candlesticks—even that rare old tablecloth trimmed with church lace. This is an entertainment to be given by a distinguished antiquary in honor of his lovely daughter"—and he bowed to each in turn—"the whole conducted under the management of his junior clerk, Mr. F. O'Day, who is very much at your service, sir."

CHAPTER VIII

Bright and early the following morning Felix began work, and for the next two days took entire charge of the room, walking up and down its length, an absolute dictator, brooking no interference from any one. When Mike's frowsy head or Hans's grimy hands appeared above the level of the landing from the floor below, steadying with their chins some new possession, it was either, "here, in the middle of the room, men!" or, if it were big and cumbersome, "up-stairs, out of the way!" This had gone on until the banquet hall was one conglomerate mass of mixed chattels from the Jersey shop, Kling's old stock being stowed in some other part of the building. Then began the picking out. First the doubtful, but rich in color, tapestries, then the rugs—some fairly good ones—stuffs, old and new, and every available rag which would hold together were spread over the four walls and the front windows. The heavier and more decorative pieces of furniture came next—among them a huge wooden altar which had never been put together and which was now backed close against the tapestries and hanging rugs in the centre of the long wall. Two Venetian wedding-chests, low enough to sit upon, were next placed in position, and between them three Spanish armchairs in faded

velvet and one in crinkly leather, held together by big Moorish nails of brass. Above these chests and chairs were hung gilt brackets holding church candles, Spanish mirrors so placed that the shortest woman in the party could see her face, and big Italian disks of dull metal. The walls were wonderful in their rich simplicity, and so was the disposition of the furniture, Felix's skilful eye having preserved the architectural proportions in both the selection and placing of the several articles.

More wonderful than all else, however, was the great gold throne at the end of the room, on which Masie was to sit and receive her guests and which was none other than the big cardinal's chair, incrusted with mouldy gilt, that had first inspired her with the idea of the party. This was hoisted up bodily and placed on an auctioneer's platform which Mike had found tilted back against the wall in the cellar. To hide its dirt and cracks, rugs were laid, pieced out by a green drugget which extended half across the floor, now swept of everything except two refreshment tables.

Next came the ceiling. What Felix did to that ceiling, or rather what that ceiling did for Felix, and how it looked when he was through with it is to this very day a topic of discussion among the now scattered inhabitants of "The Avenue." Masie knew, and so did deaf Auntie Gossburger, who often spent the day with the child. She, with Masie, had been put in charge of the china and glass department, and when the old woman had pulled up from the depths of a

barrel first one red cup without a handle and then a dozen or more, and had asked what they were for, Felix had seized them with a cry of joy: "Oil cups! They fit on the tops of these church lamps. I never expected to find these! Mike! Go over to Mr. Pestler's and tell him to send me a small box of floating night-tapers—the smallest he has. Now, Tootcums, you wait and see!"

And then the step-ladder was moved up, and Mike and one of the Dutchies passed up the lamps to Felix, who drove the hooks into the rafters—twenty-two of them—and then slid down to the floor, taking in the general effect, only to clamber up again to lengthen this chain, or shorten that, so that the whole ceiling, when the cups were filled and the tapers lighted, would be a blaze of red stars hung in a firmament of dull, yellow-washed gold.

The final touch came last. This was both a surprise and a discovery. Hans had found it flattened out on the top of a big, circular table, and was about to tear it loose when Felix, who let nothing escape his vigilant eye, seized its metal handle, whereupon the mass sagged, tilted, straightened, and then rounded out into a superb Chinese lantern of yellow silk, decorated with black dragons, with only one tear in its entire circumference, and that one Auntie Gossburger darned so skilfully that nobody noticed the hole. This, Felix, after much consideration, swung to the rafter immediately over the throne, so that its mellow light should fall directly on the child's face.

Kling, while these preparations were in progress, was in a state of mind bordering on the pathetic. Felix had made him promise not to come up until the room was finished, but every few hours his head would be thrust up over the edge of the stairs, his eyes screwed up in his fat face, an expression of wonder, not unmixed with anxiety, flitting across his countenance. Then he would back down-stairs, muttering to himself all the time; his chief cause of complaint being the hiding of so many things his customers might want to buy and the displaying of so many others at which they might only want to look!

There was, however, even after the decorations seemed complete, a bare corner to be filled with something neither too big, nor too small, nor too insistent in color or form. Felix went twice over the stock, old and new, twisted and turned, and was about to give up when he suddenly called to Masie, his face lighting under the glow of a fresh inspiration:

"I have it now! Come, Tootcums, with me! Mr. Sanderson will help us out." All of which came true; for Mr. Sanderson, ten minutes later, had bent his head close to the child's lips to hear the better, and had said: "Only two? Why, Masie, you can have the lot." And that was how the bare corner was filled with three great palms—the biggest he had in his shop—and the grand salon of the Grande Duchesse Masie Beeswings de Kling at last made ready for her guests.

This done, Felix made a final inspection of the room, adding a touch here and there—shifting a piece of

pottery or redraping the frayed end of a square of tapestry—and finding that everything kept its place in the general effect, without a single discordant note, drew Masie to a seat beside him on one of the old Venetian chests. Here, with his arms about the enthusiastic child, he laid bare the next and to him the most important number on the programme.

And in this he wrought another upheaval, one almost as great as had taken place in the room. The time-honored custom of all birthday parties entailing upon the invited the giving of presents as proof of affection, was not, he hinted gently, to be observed upon this occasion. "It is Masie who is to give the presents," he whispered, holding her closer, "and not her guests."

The child at first had protested. The long procession of guests coming up to hand her their gifts, and her fun next day when looking them over—knowing how queer some of them would be—had been part of her joyful anticipation, but Felix would not yield.

"You see, Masie, darling," he coaxed, "now that you are going to be a real princess," he was smoothing back her curls as he spoke, "you are going to be so high up in the world that nobody will dare to give you any presents. That is the way with all princesses. Kings and queens are never given presents on their birthdays unless their permission is asked, but, just because they *are* kings and queens, they give presents to everybody else. And then again, Masie, dear, if you stop to think about it, people really get a great

deal more fun out of giving things than they do of having things given to them."

She succumbed, as she always did, when her "Uncle Felix," with his voice lowered to a whisper, his lips held close to her ear, either counselled or chided her, and a new joy thrilled through her as he explained how his plan was to be carried out.

Kling lifted up his hands in protest when he heard of O'Day's innovation, but was overruled and bowled over before he had framed his first sentence. It was the sentiment, Felix insisted, which was to be considered, the good feeling behind the gift, not the cost of it. He and Masie had worked it all out together, and please not to interfere.

But Kling did interfere, and right royally, too, when he found time to think it over. Some one of the old German legends must have worked its way through the dull crust of his brain, bringing back memories of his childhood. Perhaps his conscience was pricked by his clerk's attitude. Whatever the cause, certain it is that he crept up-stairs a few hours before his house was to be thrown open to Masie's guests, and, finding the banquet hall completely finished and nobody about, Felix and Masie having gone out together to perfect some little detail connected with the gifts, walked around in an aimless way, overwhelmed by the beauty and charm of the interior as it lay before him in the afternoon light.

On his way down he met the deaf Gossburger coming up.

"Dot is awful nice!" he shouted. "I couldn't believe dot was possible! Dot is a vunderful—*vun*derful man! I don't see how dem rags and dot stuff look like dot ven you get 'em togedder anodder vay. And now dere is vun thing I don't got in my head yet: Vot is it about dese presents?"

The old woman recounted the details as best she could.

"And dot is all, is it, Auntie Gossburger? Only of pasteboard boxes vid candies in 'em, and little pieces paper vid writings on 'em dot Mr. O'Day makes? Is dot vot you mean?"

The old woman nodded.

Kling turned suddenly, went down-stairs with his head up and shoulders back, called Hans to keep shop, and put on his hat.

When he returned an hour later, he was followed by a man carrying a big box. This was placed behind Masie's throne and so concealed by a rug that even Felix missed seeing it.

That everybody had accepted—everybody who had been invited—"big, little, and middle-sized"—goes without saying. Masie had called at each house herself, with Felix as cavalier—just as he had promised her. And they had each and every one, immediately abandoned all other plans for that particular night, promising to be there as early as could be arranged, it being a Saturday and the shops on "The Avenue" open an hour later than usual—an indulgence counterbalanced

by the fact that next day was Sunday and they could all sleep as long as they pleased.

And not only the neighbors, but Nat Ganger and Sam Dogger accepted. Felix had gone down himself with Masie's message, and they both had said they would come—Sam to be on hand half an hour before the appointed hour of nine so as to serve as High Lord of the Robes, Masie having determined that nobody but "dear old Mr. Dogger" should show her how to put on the costume he had given her.

As for these two castaways, when they did enter the gorgeous room on the eventful night they fairly bubbled over.

"Don't let old Kling touch it," Ganger roared out as soon as he stepped inside, before he had even said "How do you do?" to anybody. "Keep it as an exhibit. Better still, send circulars up and down Fifth Avenue, and open it up as a school—not one of 'em knows how to furnish their houses. How the devil did you— Oh, I see! Just plain yellow-wash and the reflected red light. Looks like a stained-glass window in a measly old church. Where's Sam. Oh, behind that screen. Well come out here and look at that ceiling!"

Sam didn't come out, and didn't intend to. He was busy with the child's curls, which were bunched up in the fingers of one hand, while the other was pressing the wide leghorn hat into the precise angle which would become her most, the Gossburger standing by with the rest of the costume, Masie's face a sunburst of happiness.

"And now the long skirt, Mrs. Bombagger, or whatever your name is. That's it, over her head first and then down along the floor so she will look as if she was grown up. And now the big ostrich-plume fan—a little seedy, my dear, and yellow as a kite's foot, but nobody'll see it under that big, yellow lantern. Now let me look at you! Nat, *Nat!* where are you, you beggar, stop rummaging around that dead stuff and come behind here and look at this live child! yes, right in here. Now look! Did you ever in all your born days see anything half so pretty?" the outburst ending with, "Scat, you little devil of a dog!" when Fudge gave a howl at being stepped upon.

Masie, as she listened, plumed her head as a pigeon would preen its feathers, stood up to see her train sweep the floor, sat down again to watch the stained satin folds crumple themselves about her feet, and was at last so overcome by it all that she threw her arms around Sam, to his intense delight, and kissed him twice, and would have given Nat an equal number had not Felix called to him that the guests were beginning to arrive.

As to these guests, you could not have gotten their names on one side of Kitty's order-book, nor on both sides, for that matter. There was brisk, bustling Bundleton the grocer in a green necktie, white waistcoat, and checked trousers, arm and arm with his thin wife in black silk and mitts; there was Heffern the dairyman in funeral black, relieved by a brown tie, and his daughter, in variegated muslin, accompanied by two

young men whom neither Kling nor Felix nor the Gossburger had ever heard of or seen before, but who were heartily welcomed; there were fat Porterfield the butcher in his every-day clothes, minus his apron, with his two girls, aged ten and fourteen, their hair in pigtails tied with blue ribbons; there were Mr. and Mrs. Codman, all in their best "Sunday-go-to-meetings," with their little daughter Polly, named after the mother, pretty as a picture and a great friend of Masie—most distinguished people were the Codmans, he looking like an alderman and his wife the personification of good humor, her rosy cheeks matching the tint of her husband's necktie.

There was Digwell the undertaker in his professional clothes, enlivened by a white waistcoat and red scarf, quite beside himself with joy because nobody had died or was likely to die so far as he had heard, thus permitting him to "send dull care to the winds!"—his own way of putting it. There was Pestler the druggist in an up-to-date dress suit as good as anybody's—almost as good as the one Felix wore, and from which, for the first time since he landed, he had shaken the creases. There was Tim Kelsey, in the suit of clothes he wore every day, the only difference being the high collar instead of the turned-down one, the change giving him the appearance of a man with a bandaged neck, so narrow were his poor shoulders and so big was the fine head overtopping it. There were Mike and Bobby and the two Dutchies and Sanderson, who came with his hands full of roses for Masie, and a score of others whose names the scribe

forgets, besides lots and lots of children of all sizes and ages.

And there were Kitty and John—and they were both magnificent—at least Kitty was—she being altogether resplendent in black alpaca finished off by a fichu of white lace, her big, full-bosomed, robust body filling it without a crease; and he in a new suit bought for the occasion, and which fitted him everywhere except around the waist—a defect which Kitty had made good by means of a well-concealed safety-pin in the back.

It was for Kitty that Felix had been on the lookout ever since the guests began to arrive, and no sooner did her rosy, beaming face appear behind that of her husband, than he pushed his way through the throng to reach her side. "No, not out here, Mistress Kitty," he cried. Had she been of royal blood he could not have treated her with more distinction. "You are to stand alongside of Masie when she comes in; the child has no mother, and you must look after her."

"No mother! Mr. O'Day! God rest your soul, she won't need to do without one long, she's that lovely. There'll be plenty will want to mother, and brother her, too, for that matter. My goodness, what a place ye made of it! Look at them lamps, all fireworks up there, and that big chair! I wonder who robbed a church to get it! Well—well—*well!* John! did ye ever see the like? Otto, ye ought to rent this place out for a chowder-party ball. Well, well, I *never!*"

The comments of some of the others, while they voiced their complete surprise, were less enthusiastic.

Bundleton, after shaking hands with Felix and Kitty, and then with Kling, dropped his wife and made a tour of the room without uttering a sound of any kind until he reached Felix again, when he remarked gravely: "I should think it would worry you some to keep the moths out of this stuff," and then passed on to tell Kling he must look out "them lamps didn't spill and set things on fire."

Porterfield, as was to be expected, was distinctly practical. "Awful lot of truck when you get it all together, ain't it, Mr. O'Day? I was just tellin' my wife that them two chairs up t'other side of the room wouldn't last long in my parlor, they're that wabbly. But maybe these Fifth Avenue folks don't do no sittin'—just keep 'em in a glass case to look at."

Pestler was more discerning. He had come across an iridescent glass jar, and was edging around for an opportunity to ask Kling the price without letting Felix overhear him—it being an occasion, he knew, in which Mr. O'Day would feel offended if business were mentioned. "Might do to put in my window, if it didn't cost too much," he had begun, and as suddenly stopped as he caught Felix's eyes fastened upon him.

There were others, however, whose delight could not be repressed. Tim Kelsey, after the proper greetings were over, had wandered off down the room, stopping to examine each article in its place on the walls. Finally some pieces of old Delft caught his eye. He made a memorandum of two in a little book he took from his inside pocket, and later on, when a break

in the surrounding conversation made it possible, remarked to Felix: "They seem to get everything in the new Delft but the old delicious glaze. On a wall it doesn't matter, but you don't feel like putting real old Delft on a wall. I like to stroke it, as I would a friend's hand."

These inspections and comments over, and that peculiar timidity which comes over certain classes lifted out of their customary environment and doing their best to become accustomed to new surroundings having begun to wear away under the tactful welcome of Felix, and the hour having arrived for the grand ceremony of gift-giving, the throne was pushed back, Masie called from behind her screen, and O'Day's wicker basket filled with the presents was laid by the side of the big chair.

Kling and Kitty were now beckoned to and placed on the left of the throne, Felix taking up his position on the right.

The stir on the platform caused by these arrangements soon attracted everybody's attention and a sudden hush fell upon the room. What was about to happen nobody knew, but something important, or Mr. O'Day would not have stepped to its edge, nor would Otto have been so red in the face, nor Kitty so radiant.

Felix raised his hand to command supreme silence.

"Masie wishes me," he began in his low, even voice, "to tell you that she has done her best to remember every one, and that she hopes nobody has been for-

gotten. These little trifles she is about to give you are not gifts, but just little mementos to express her thanks for your kindness in coming to her first party. She bids me tell you, too, that her love goes out to every one of you on this the happiest night of her life and that she welcomes you all with her whole heart."

He turned, stepped back a pace, made the radiant child a low bow, held out his hand, and led her into full view of the audience, the rays of the big lantern softening the tones of the quaint, picturesque costume which concealed her slight figure, transforming the child of eleven into the woman of eighteen.

For at least ten seconds, and that is a long period of time when your heart is in your mouth and you are ready to explode with uncontrollable delight, not a sound of any kind broke the silence, no handclap of welcome, no murmur of applause; just plain, simple astonishment, the kind that takes your breath away. That Kling's little girl stood before them, nobody believed. O'Day had fooled them with this new vision, just as he had bewitched them by the glamour of the decorated room. Only when a few simple words of welcome fell from her lips were the flood-gates opened. Then a shout went up which set the candles winking—a shout only surpassed in volume and good cheer when Felix began handing up the little packages from Masie's basket. And dainty little packages they were, filled with all sorts of inexpensive souvenirs that she and Felix (not much money between the two of them) had picked up at Baxter's Toy Shop on Third Avenue, all

suggested by some peculiarity of the recipient, all kindly and good-natured, and each one enlivened by a quotation or some original line in Felix's own handwriting.

During the whole delightful ceremony Otto had stood on the left of his daughter, his heart thumping away, his face growing redder every minute, his eyes intent on each guest elbowing a way through the crowd as Masie handed them their gifts, noting the general happiness and the laughter that followed the reading of the lines, wondering all the time why no one was offended at the size and, to him, worthlessness of the several offerings.

When it was all over and the basket empty, he jumped down from the platform, his fat back bent in excitement, tossed aside the rug, lifted the big box, placed it beside the gilt throne, and raised his puffy hands to command attention: "Now listen, everybody! I got someting to say. Beesvings don't have all dis to herselluf. Now it is my turn. Come up closer so I get hold of you. Vait, and I git back on de platform. Here, you olt frent of mine, Dan Porterfield, here is a new butcher-knife sharpener for you, to sharpen your knives on ven you cuts dem bifsteaks. And, Heffern, come close; here is a silver-plated skimmer for dot cream you make, and a pig fan for your daughter. And Polly Codman—git out of de way dere, and let Polly Codman come up!—here, Polly, is a pair of gloves for you and a muffler for Codman, and here is more gloves and neckties and—I got a lot more; I didn't got much time and I bought dem all in a hurry—and dey are all

from me and Masie and don't you forgit dot. I ain't never been so happy as I am to-night, and you vas awful good to come and see my little girl dot don't got no mudder. And you must all tank Mr. O'Day for de great help he vas. Now dot's all I got to say."

He drew his hand across his eyes, made an awkward bow, and sat down. Everybody gasped in amazement. Many of them had known him for years, ever since he moved into "The Avenue"—twenty years, at least—but nobody had ever seen him as he was to-night. That he had in his intended generosity overlooked half of his friends made no difference. Those who received something showed it for weeks afterward to everybody who came. Those who had nothing forgave him in their delight over the good-will he had shown to the others. Even Felix, who had been watching him soften and thaw out under the warmth of the child's happiness, and who thought he knew the man and his nature, was astounded, and showed it by grasping for the first time his employer's hand, looking him in the eyes as he said, "I owe you an apology, sir," a proceeding Otto often pondered over, its meaning wholly escaping him.

But the great surprise of the evening, in which even Felix had had no share, was yet to come. He had carried out his promise to provide the simple refreshments, and a table had been set apart for their serving. The sandwiches made at the bakeshop a block below had already arrived and been put in place, and he was about to announce supper, when he became aware that a mysterious conference was being held near the top of

the stairs, in which Kitty, Polly Codman, and Heffern's daughter Mary, were taking part. He had already noticed, with some discomfiture, the absence of a number of male guests, half of them having left the room without presenting themselves before Masie to bid her good night, and was about to ask Kitty for an explanation, when a series of thumping sounds reached his ear; something heavy was being rolled along the floor beneath his feet. As the noise increased, Kitty and her beaming coconspirators craned their necks over the banisters and a welcoming roar went up. Bundleton's head now came into view, a wreath of smilax wound loosely around his neck, followed by one of his men carrying a keg of beer; another shouldering a sawhorse, a wooden mallet, and a wooden spigot; and still a third with a basket of stone mugs.

"Come, folks and neighbors, everybody have a glass of beer with me!" shouted Bundleton.

Up went the sawhorse before you would wink your eye! Down went the keg across its arms, the smilax around it! Bang went the bung! In went the wooden spigot! And out flew the white froth!

Another roar now went up, accompanied by great clapping of hands. It was Codman's head this time, a cook's cap resting on his ears, his hands bearing a great dish athwart which lay a cold salmon that the baker had cooked for him that morning. Close behind came Pestler with a tray filled with boxes of candy, and next Sanderson with a flattish basket piled high with carnations, each one tied as a boutonnière;

and Porterfield with a bunch of bananas; and so on and so on—each arrival being received with fresh roars and shouts of welcoming approval. Last of all came Kitty, her face one great, pervading, all-embracing laugh, her own big coffee-pot filled to the brim and smoking hot on a waiter, her boy Bobby following, loaded down with cups and saucers.

Supper over—and it was a mighty feast, with everybody waiting on everybody else, Kitty busiest of all, filling each cup herself—Digwell the undertaker, who had really been the life of the party, remarked in a voice loud enough to be heard half-way across the room that it was a pity there was no piano, as a party could not be a real party without a dance. At this Kling, who was having a mug with Codman, rose from his seat, stepped to the top of the stairs and, looking over the crowd, called for four strong men, "right avay, k'vick!" Codman, Pestler, Mike, and Digwell responded, and before anybody knew where they had gone, or what it was all about, up came an old-fashioned spinet, which Kling remembered had been hidden behind a Martha Washington bedstead on the floor below.

"All together, men!" shouted Codman, and it was picked up bodily, whirled into position, dusted off in a jiffy, and ready for use.

At this Pestler sprang to his feet, shouted he was coming back in a minute, rushed to the stairway, went down three steps at a time, bolted through the front door, across the street, up into his bedroom, and back

again, all in one breath, waving his violin triumphantly over his head as he entered.

And then it was that the real fun began. And then it was that virtue had its own reward, for not a living soul in the room could play a note on the spinet except the tallest and spookiest and, to all appearances, the stupidest of the two young men, whom the Heffern girl had brought and who turned out to have once been the star pianist in some dance-hall on the Bowery. And the scribe remarks, parenthetically and in all seriousness, that the way that lank, pin-headed young man revived the soul of that old, worn-out harpischord, digging into its ribs, kicking at its knees with both feet, hand-massaging every one of the keys up, down, and crossways, until the ancient fossil fairly rattled itself loose with the joy of being alive once more, was altogether the most astounding miracle he has ever had to record. And Pestler with his violin was not far behind.

Everything had now broken loose.

At the first note, up jumped Kitty, caught John around the neck, and went whirling around the room. At the second note, up jumped Codman, made a dive for Polly, missed her in the mix-up and, grabbing Mrs. Digwell instead, went sailing down the room as if he had done nothing else all his life. At the third note, away went Sanderson and Bundleton, Heffern, everybody but the two castaways and Tim Kelsey, who beat juba on their knees, old Sam Dogger playing a tattoo all by himself with two knife-handles and a plate. Some

danced with their own wives; some with anybody's wife or daughter or child—a grand hullabaloo, down the middle, across, back, and up again, until everybody was exhausted and fell in a heap into Felix's Spanish chairs, or on his Venetian wedding-chests, or wherever else they could find resting-places in which to catch their breaths.

And now comes the crowning touch of all—the last of the evening's surprises, and one remembered the longest because of its simplicity and its beauty!

When everybody was resting, out stepped Felix, the light of the overhead candles falling on his pale, thoughtful face, white shirt-front, and faultless suit of black which fitted his well-knit, handsome frame like a glove, and with him the Grande Duchesse Masie de Kling, the child bowing and smiling as she passed, the wide leghorn hat shading her face from the light of the lanterns above, her long train caught, woman-fashion, over her arm. Then, with a low word to the pin-headed young man, followed by a downward wave of his palm to denote the time, and the child's fingers firm in his own, Felix led her through an old-fashioned, stately minuet, telling her in an undertone just what steps to take.

It was Sunday morning before the merry party broke up and streamed out through Kling's lower shop, and so on into the street. Everybody had had the time of their lives. Such remarks as "Would ye have believed it of Otto?" or, "Wasn't Masie the sweetest thing ye ever saw?" or, "Just think of Mr. O'Day fixing up that old

junk room the way he did—ye can't beat him nowheres!" or, "Oh, I tell ye, Otto struck it rich when he took him on!" were heard on all sides.

So loud were the laughter and chatter, the good nights and good-bys, that big Tom McGinniss moved over from the opposite curb.

"Halloo, John!" cried the policeman. "I thought I couldn't be mistaken. And Kitty, that you with your coffee-pot? I just come up from Lexington Avenue and heard the row, wondering what was up. Is it up-stairs ye were? *What!* Dutchy givin' a ball? Oh, ye can't mean it! No, thank ye, Kitty, it will be too late for ye all—I'll drop in to-morrow night. Well, take care of yourselves," and he disappeared in the darkness.

Felix watched the throng disperse, bade Kitty and John good night, and, turning sharply, directed his steps toward Madison Square. Here he sank upon a bench, away from the glare of an overhead lamp. For some minutes he sat without moving, his mind wholly absorbed with the events of the preceding hours. The roar and crush of the room came back to him. He caught again the light in Masie's eyes as she followed his lead in the dance and the mob of happy faces crowding to her side, and then with a shudder he confronted the gaunt sorrow that had hourly dogged his steps. An overpowering sense of depression now took possession of him. Pushing back his hat as if to give himself more air, he was about to resume his walk when he became conscious that something had stirred at the far end of the seat.

Straightening his broad shoulders, his quick, alert manner returning, he moved nearer, his eyes searching the gloom. A newsboy, a little chap of seven or eight, his papers under him, lay fast asleep.

For an instant he watched the rise and fall of the boy's breath, adjusted the short, patched coat about the little fellow's knees, and then slid back to his end of the bench.

"Same old grind," he said to himself, "no home—no money—cold—maybe hungry. Never too young to suffer—never too old to eat your heart out. What a damnable world it is!"

Rising to his feet, he felt in his pocket for a coin, widened the pocket of the waif's jacket, and slipped it in. The boy stirred, tightened his grasp on his papers, and lay still.

Felix looked down at him for a moment, turned, and with lightened steps continued his walk.

"Well, thank God," he said as he neared "The Avenue," "Masie was happy one night in her life."

CHAPTER IX

That the memories of Masie's birthday party should have been revived again and again, and that the several incidents should have been discussed for days thereafter—every eye growing the brighter in the telling—was to have been expected. Kitty could talk of nothing else. The beauty of the room; the charm of Masie's costume; Kling's generosity; and last, O'Day's bearing and appearance as he led the child through the stately dance, looking, as Kitty expressed it, "that fine and handsome you would have thought he was a lord mayor," were now her daily topics of conversation.

Masie was equally enthusiastic, rushing down-stairs the next morning to throw her arms around his neck with an "Oh, Uncle Felix, I never, *never*, NEVER was so happy in all my life!"

Kling was still more jubilant. The success of Masie's banquet room had established him at once among bric-à-brac dealers as a competitor quite out of the ordinary. His old customers came in flocks, walking about with gasps of astonishment. Before the week was out, a masonic lodge had bought the throne, a seaside resort the big Chinese lantern, and two of the four Spanish chairs had found a home in a millionaire's library.

Moreover—and this was all the more remarkable in view of his early training—a certain deference became apparent in the Dutchman's manner not only toward Felix but toward his customers. He no longer received them in his shirt-sleeves. He bought some new clothes and sported a collar, necktie, and hat, duplicating those worn by Felix as near as his memory served.

Still more remarkable were the changes wrought among the neighbors in their attitude toward O'Day. Until then they had, in their independent fashion, treated him like any of the other men who came in and out their several stores, pleased with his interest in the business, but quickly forgetting him as they became reabsorbed in the affairs of the day. Now, as they told him what a good time they had had on the birthday, they raised their hats. Porterfield went so far as to tell the radiant Kitty that her boarder was a "Jim Dandy," and that if she should lay her hands on another to "trot him out."

Kitty of course had expected these triumphs, but that it was she who had made them possible, and that but for her own individual efforts Felix might still be wandering around the streets in search of bed and board, apparently never crossed her mind. He would have been just as splendid, she said to herself, and just as much of a man no matter who had helped and no matter where his feet had landed.

If O'Day were aware of the changes of public opinion going on around him, there was nothing in either his manner or in his speech to show it. When they

complimented him on the way in which he had utilized Otto's old stock, producing so wonderful an interior, he would remark quietly that it was nothing to his credit. He had always loved such things; that it came natural to some people to put things to rights, and that any one could have done as much. It was only when some one alluded to Masie that his face would light up. "Yes, charming, was she not? Such a wonderful little lady, and so good!"

That which did please him—please him immensely—was the outcome of a visit made some days after the party by old Nat Ganger.

"Regular Aladdin lamp," Nat shouted, slamming Kling's door behind him. "One rub, bang goes the rubbish, and up comes an Oriental palace. Another rub and little devils swarm over the walls and ceilings and begin hanging up stuffs and lamps. Another rub, and before you can wink your eye, out steps a little princess, a million times prettier than any Cinderella that ever lived. Wonderful! *Wonderful!*

"Where is the darling child anyway. Can't I see her? I got away from Sam, telling him I was going to look up another frame for one of my pictures. Here it is. All a lie, every bit of it. It's Sam's picture. Not mine. I wrapped it up so he wouldn't know, but I came to see that darling child all the same, for I've got a surprise for her. But first I want you to see this picture. Here, wait until I untie this string. It's one of Sam's Hudson Rivery things. Palisades and a steamboat in the foreground, and an afternoon sky.

Easy dodge, don't you see? Yellow sky and purple hill, and short streak for the steamboat and its wake, and a smear of white steam straggling behind. Sam does 'em as well as anybody. Sometimes he puts in a pile or two in the foreground for a broken dock and a rowboat with a lone fisherman squatting on the hind seat. Then he asks five dollars more. Always get more you know for figures in a landscape."

He had unwrapped the canvas by this time, and was holding it to the light of the window that Felix might see it better.

Felix studied it carefully, even to the cramped signature in the corner, "Samuel Dogger, A. N. A."; and with an appreciative smile said: "Very good, I should say. Yes, very good."

"Good! It's really very bad, and you know it. So do I. But you're too much of a gentleman to say so. Can't be worse, really, but 'puttying up' is down by the heels, and there hasn't been an old master from Flushing, Long Island, or Weehawken, New Jersey, lugged up our stairs for a month;—two months, really. We had one last week from a dealer down-town which turned out to be genuine after Sam had looked it over. And, of course, Sam wouldn't touch it and sent for the auctioneer and told him so. And the beggar made Sam hunt for the signature and Sam found it at the top of the canvas instead of at the bottom. One of the early Dutchmen Sam said it was. Some kind of a Beck or a Koven. And would you believe it, the very next day the fellow got a whacking price for it from a

collector up in one of the side streets near the Park. So Sam has gone back to the early American school. This means that he's getting down to his last five-dollar bill, and I want to tell you that I'm not far from it myself. I'd have been dead broke if I hadn't sold two Fatimas. One in pink pants and the other a flying angel in summer clothes to fit an alcove in an up-town barroom over the cigar-stand.

"But my money isn't Sam's money," he went on without pausing, "and Sam won't touch a penny of it. Never does unless I fool him on the sly. And I've come up here to fool him now, and fool him bad. I want you to hold on to this bust—wait until I get it out of my pocket." Here he pulled out a small bronze, a head of Augustus, beautifully wrought.

"If you buy the picture, I'll throw in the ancient Roman," and he laid it on the counter.

"And I want you to write Sam a note, asking him if he can't look around for one of his masterpieces, something say ten by fourteen; wanted for a customer who only buys good things. That any little landscape with water in it will do. Remember, don't leave out the water. Then Sam will come thumping down-stairs with the note, and I'll be awfully astonished and we'll talk it over, and I'll pull this out from under a pile of stuff where I'll hide it as soon as I get home. Then I'll say: 'Well, I'm going up-town and have Mr. O'Day look at it, and maybe it will suit him, and that if it does, I'll make him pay fifty dollars for it.' How do you think that will work?"

Felix, who had been looking into the old fellow's eyes, reading his mind in their depths, seeing clear down into the heart beneath, now picked up the bronze and began passing his hand over it.

"Very lovely," he said at last, "and a marvellous paten. Where did you get it?"

"Spoken like a gentleman and a man of honor, and this time you tell the truth. It's just what you say —marvellous. I swapped a twenty by thirty for it. Will you take it?"

Felix shook his head, a smile playing about his lips.

"I would if I wanted to be unfair. Here, take your bronze and leave the picture. I will find a frame for it, and have one of the men give it a coat of varnish."

"And you'll write the note?"

"Is that necessary?"

"Of *course,* it's necessary. You don't know Sam. He's as cunning as a weasel and can get away before you know it. Got to fool him. I always do. Told him more lies in one minute this morning than a horse can trot. Will you write the note?"

Felix laughed. "Yes, just as soon as you go."

"And you won't hold on to the bronze?"

"No, I won't hold on to the bronze."

"And you can get fifty dollars for this unexampled work of art? That, of course, is the *asking* price. Ten would do a whole lot of good."

"I cannot say positively, but I will try."

"All right. And now where's that darling child?"

A laugh rang out from the top of the stairs, the laugh

of a child overjoyed at meeting some one she loves, followed by "do you mean me?"

"Of course, I mean you, Toddlekins. Come down here and let me give you a big hug. And I've got a message for you from that dried-up old fellow with the shaggy head. He sent you his love—every bit of it, he said. And he's found some more gewgaws he's going to bring up some day. Told me that, too."

Masie had reached the floor and was running toward him with her hands extended, Fudge springing in front.

The old painter caught her up in his arms, lifting her off her little feet, and as quickly setting her down, his eyes snapping, his whole face aglow. The joy bottled up in the child seemed to have swept through him like an electric current.

"And wasn't it a beautiful party?" she burst out when she found her breath. "And wasn't Uncle Felix good to make it all for me?" She had moved to O'Day's side and had slipped her hand in his.

"Yes, of course, it was," roared Ganger. "Why, old Sam Dogger was so excited when he went to bed, he didn't sleep a wink all night. He's thought of nothing else but parties ever since. He's getting up one for you. Told me so this morning."

The child's eyes dilated.

"What sort of a party?"

"Oh, a dandy party, but it's not going to be at night. It's going to be in the daytime. All out in the blessed sunshine and under the trees. And everybody is going to be invited—everybody who belongs."

The child's brow clouded. "Everybody who belongs? Why, can't Uncle Felix come?"

"Certainly, he can come. He 'belongs.'"

"And—Fudge?"

"What, that little devil of a dog? Yes, he can come, if he promises to behave himself," and he shook his head at the culprit. "And all the chippies can come. Lots of 'em, and perhaps a couple of robins, if they haven't gone away south. And there's a big Newfoundland dog, or was before he was stolen, that could have swallowed this gentleman down at one gulp, but he won't now. *He* 'belonged' and always has. And, of course, you 'belong' and so does Sam and so do I. We go out every other week and sit under these very same trees. Sam paints the branches wiggling down in the water, and I do leaky boats. When I get the picture home, I put Jane Hoggson fishin' in the stern.

Masie rolled her eyes.

"And you don't take her with you?"

"No."

"Why?"

"'Cause she don't 'belong.' Great difference whether you belong or not. Jane Hoggson couldn't 'belong' if she was to be born all over again."

O'Day now joined in. He had been watching Masie, noting the lights and shadows which swept over her face as the old painter chattered away. He always welcomed any plan for giving her pleasure, and was blessing Ganger in his heart for providing the diversion.

"And where is all this to take place, Mr. Ganger?" Felix asked at last.

"Up on the Bronx. A place you know nothing of and wouldn't believe a word about if I should tell you—not 'til you see it yourself. It's as full of birds and butterflies as England along the Thames, or one of those ducky little streams out of Paris. And it only costs five cents to get there and five cents to get back. And you won't be more than a few hours away from your shop. Fine, I tell you, you'll never forget it."

Again Felix broke in.

"I have not a doubt of it, but when is all this to take place?"

Ganger gave a little start and grew suddenly grave.

"Well, as to that, you see the day is not yet fixed, not precisely. In a week maybe, or it may be two weeks. This is Sam's party, you know, and he hasn't completed all his arrangements—that is, he hadn't completed them when I left him this morning. And, of course, a lot has to be done to make everything ready"—here he nodded at Masie—"for little princesses and great ladies in plumes and satins. But it is certainly coming off. Old Sam told me so, and he means every word of it. And he was to let you know when. That's it, he was to *let you know.* That's another thing he told me to tell you."

The child's name was now called from the top of the stairs, and the Gossburger's head craned itself over the hand-rail. Fudge opened with a sharp bark, and Masie, with an air kiss to Ganger, raced up the steps,

the dog at her heels, shouting as she ran: "Tell Mr. Dogger I send him a kiss, and I thank him ever so much, and won't he please come and see me very soon."

When she had disappeared, the old fellow leaned forward, gazed knowingly at Felix, and in soft-pedal tones said:

"You see, Sam couldn't say *exactly* when the party was to take place because—well, because he hasn't heard a word about it, and won't until I get back. It is my party, not Sam's, and I've got to break it to him gently. And I've got to fool him about the party, make him think it's his party, or he'll think I'm holding it over him because I've got a little more money than he has, just as I intend to fool him about the picture. I couldn't say, when you asked me, when the day was to be fixed, because I've told lies enough to that dear child. But I know just what Sam will do when I tell him about his party; he'll stand on his head he'll be so happy. You see if, when I unwrapped the picture, you had talked ten dollars right out, why then I was going to make it next Saturday; that is, to-morrow. But you hemmed and hawed so, I had to make it 'some day soon.' Of course, I never expected the fifty; ten will be enough for car-fare all around and some beer and sandwiches, that's all we ever have. That's why I chucked in Augustus to make sure. Well, see what you can do, and don't forget to write the note and I'll do the rest of the lying." And chuckling to himself he hurried away.

As the door swung wide, a slim man bustled past him, and, spying Felix, moved briskly to where he stood. He had just ten minutes to spare, he announced, and was looking for a present for his wife; "something in the way of fans, old ones, and not over five dollars."

Felix, who had raised the lid of the case and was stowing Dogger's masterpiece inside to keep it out of harm's way, his mind wholly occupied with the two old painters and their tenderness toward each other, roused himself to answer:

"Yes, half a dozen. Not at your price, though, not old ones. Here are two fairly good specimens," and he handed them out and laid them on the glass before him.

The man leaned forward and peered into the case. "That's a picture of the Palisades, isn't it?" He had ignored the fans.

"Yes, so I understand."

"Oh, I knew it first time I put my eyes on it. I'm in the real-estate business. I've got a lot of cottage sites along that top edge. Is it for sale?"

"It will be when it's cleaned and varnished and I have it framed."

"Belong to you?"

"No; it belongs to a man who has left it for sale. He went out as you came in."

"What does he want for it?"

"He would be satisfied with ten dollars, even less, because he needs the money. I want fifty."

"You want to make the rest?"

"No, it all goes to him."

"Well, what do you stick it on for?"

"Because if it isn't worth that, it isn't worth anything."

"Take it out and let me have a look at it. Yes, just the spot. That whitish streak and that little puff of steam is where they're breaking stone. Make a good advertisement, wouldn't it, hanging up in your office? You can show the owners just where the land lies, and you can show a customer just what he's going to own."

A brisk bargaining then followed, he determined to buy, and Felix to maintain his price. Before the ten minutes were out, the bustling man had forgotten all about the fan he was in search of for his wife and, having assured himself that it was all oil-paint, every square inch of it, had propped it up against an ancient clock, standing back to see the effect, had haggled on five, then ten, then twenty-five, and had finally surrendered by laying five ten-dollar bills on the glass case. After which he tucked the picture under his arm, and without a word of any kind disappeared through the street-door.

And that is why the note which Felix had promised to write Dogger was sent by messenger instead of by mail within five minutes after the picture and the buyer had disappeared. And that is why, too, all the preliminary subterfuges were omitted, and the substitute contained the announcement which follows:

"DEAR MR. DOGGER:

"I have just sold your Palisade picture for fifty dollars. The amount is at your service whenever you call.

"Yours truly,

"FELIX O'DAY."

That, too, is why Dogger was so overjoyed that he beat the messenger back to Kling's, skipping over the flag-stones most of the way till he reached the Dutchman's door, where, as befitted a painter whose genius had at last been recognized, he slowed down, entering the store with a steady gait, a little restrained in his manner, saying, as he tried to cram down his joy, that it was a mere sketch, you know, something that he had knocked off out-of-doors; that Nat had liked it and had, so he said, taken it up to have it framed. That, of course, he could not afford ever to repeat the sale price—not for a ten by fourteen of that quality, but that most of his rich patrons were still out of town, and so it came in very well.

And, oh, yes, he had almost forgotten! He and Nat were going up to Laguerre's, on the Bronx, to an old French café, where they often lunched and painted; that Nat had suggested just as he left the studio that it would be a good thing if Felix and that dear child Masie would go with them, and that they would go Saturday, which was to-morrow, if that would suit O'Day and Masie. And if that wouldn't suit, why then they'd go the very first day that did, say Sunday or Monday, the sooner the better.

To all of which Felix, reading every thought that lurked behind the moist eyes of the tender-hearted old fraud, had replied that, if he had the choosing, to-morrow, of all the days in the year, would be the very day he would select, and that he and Masie would be ready any hour that he and Mr. Ganger would be good enough to call for them.

At which the old painter took himself off in high glee.

And an altogether delightful and a very happy party it was. Sam, as host-in-chief, sparing no expense, his first act being to pre-empt a summer-house covered with vines, already tinged by the touches of autumn's fingers; and his second to insist in a loud voice on chairs and table-cloths, instead of a sandwich spread out on a bench, as had been their custom, followed by a demand for olives and a small bottle of red wine, to say nothing of a double brace of chops, and all with the air of a multimillionaire ordering a cold bottle and a hot bird at Delmonico's. And Nat, grown ten years younger —a mere boy in fact—showed Masie how to throw little leaden weights down the throat of a small cast-iron frog, and Felix mixed the salad and served it, Masie changing the dishes and running back to the house for fresh ones, while Fudge, in frenzied glee, scurried over the soft earth as if he had suddenly been seized with St. Vitus's dance. And then, when there was not a crumb of anything left even for the chippies, they all stretched themselves flat on the grass in the warm Indian summer weather, the two old fellows en-

tertaining the child with all the stories they could think of, Felix looking on, replenishing his pipe from time to time, his own spirit soothed and comforted by the happiness around him.

Even Kitty noticed the new light in his eyes when they all came back, for Felix brought the two old painters into her sitting-room so that they might renew an acquaintance they had made on the night of the ball and "become better known to a woman of distinction," as he laughingly put it, which so delighted the dear soul that that night she said to her husband:

"He'll stop trampin' pretty soon, I think, John. Somethin's soaked into him in the last day or two. It's them old painters, I think, that's helpin' him. He come in a while ago with that child clingin' to him and them two mossbacks followin' behin', and his face was all ironed out, and I could see a song trembling on his lips all ready to burst out. Pray God it'll last!"

CHAPTER X

While it was true that Felix, since Masie's party, had gained the complete good-will of his neighbors, there were, strange as it may seem, certain individuals who, while they acknowledged the charm of his personality, resented his quiet reserve. What nettled them most was his not having told them at once who he was and why he had come to Kling's, and why he had stayed on wrapped in mystery. They considered themselves, so to speak, as defrauded of something which was their right and said so in plain terms.

"Well, I hope it won't be a pair of handcuffs they'll surprise him with some day"; or, "When that pal of his turns up, then you'll see fun," being some of the suggestions frequently made over counters, to be answered by his loyal adherents with a "Well, I don't care what ye say. I ain't never come across no man any better than Felix O'Day since I lived here, and that's no lie."

There were others, too, who refused to believe any good of the self-contained, reticent stranger. The nephew of somebody's brother-in-law, who lived in Lexington Avenue, was one. He had been promised, by the cousin of somebody else, the position of clerk with Otto Kling, and although Otto had never heard

of it, he *would* have heard of it and the nephew been duly installed but for "a galoot who *said* his name was O'Day."

And another thing. What was a fellow, who would work under a Dutchman like Kling, for only enough to pay his board, doing with a dress suit, anyhow? The fact was that O'Day was either here "on the quiet" to escape his creditors, while his friends were trying to patch things up for his return, or he was an English valet who had stolen his master's clothes.

A new rumor now filled the air. O'Day, was a spy sent by some foreign government to look after important interests, like that Russian who had been employed in a publishing house, where he wrote articles for an encyclopædia, only to be recognized later, whereupon he had disappeared and was never seen again. Tim Kelsey had known him. In fact, he had visited often Tim's bookstore at night, just as O'Day was visiting it, and where a lot of other queer-looking people could be found if anybody would "take the trouble to knock at Kelsey's door and peer in through the tobacco smoke some night."

All this gossip rolled off Kitty's mind as rain from a tin roof. Only once did she rise up in anger with a "Get out of my place! I'll not have ye soiling the air with yer dirty talk. Get out, I say! Ye don't know a gentleman when ye see him, and ye never will."

It was when these rumors as to her lodger's identity were thickest and when Kitty's heart had begun to

fear that his despondency was returning, his nightly prowls having been resumed, that a hansom cab stopped in front of her door.

It was one of her busy days, the sidewalk being blocked up with twenty or more trunks, parcels, cribs, and baby-carriages on their way, by the aid of Mike, the big white horse, and John, to the Ferry for shipment to Lakewood. Kitty was in charge of the quarter-deck, her head bare, her sleeves rolled above her elbows, showing her plump, ruddy arms, her cheeks and eyes aglow with the crisp air of the morning. October had set in, and one of those lung-filling, bracing days—the sky swept by dancing clouds, dragging their skirts in their flight—was making glad the great city.

Kitty loved its snap and tang. She loved, too, the excitement aroused by her duties, and was never so happy as when there were but so many minutes to catch a train—a fact she never ceased to impress upon everybody about her, she knowing all the time that she would so manage the loading as to have five minutes to spare.

"In with those hand-bags, Mike—in the front, where that Saratoga trunk won't smash 'em. Now that crib —no—not loose! Get that strap around it; do ye want to have to pick it up before ye get half-way to the tunnel? Hurry up, John, dear! Hold on—give me the other handle of that—look at it now, big as a chicken-coop! Them Fifth Avenue ladies will be livin' in these things if they keep on."

These orders and remarks, fired in rapid succession,

were interrupted to her great annoyance by the driver of the hansom cab, who, impatient at the delay, had touched his horse lightly with the whip, bringing the big wheels to a stop in front of the huge trunk which Kitty was anathematizing.

"Go on wid ye! Drive on, I tell ye!" she cried, opening fire on the driver.

"Gentleman wants to——"

"Well, I don't care what the gentleman wants. This stuff's got to go aboard that wagon."

Here the passenger's head was thrust forward.

"Can you——"

"Yes, of course I can, and glad to, no matter what it is—but not this minute. Don't ye see what I'm up against?"

The hansom was backed its full length, the passenger watching Kitty's movements with evident amusement.

Two strong hands, one Kitty's and the other John's —mostly John's—lifted the chicken-coop of a trunk bodily, rested it for an instant on the forward wheel, and with another "all together" jerk sent it rolling into the wagon. This completed the loading.

The passenger craned his head again.

"I am staying in Gramercy Park, and want——"

Kitty, who had been stretching her neck to its full length to catch his words, straightened up. "Ye'll have to get out. I'm no long-distance telephone, and the racket of them horse-cars is enough to set a body crazy."

The passenger laughed, stretched out a leg, gathered

the other beside it, and stepped to the sidewalk. "You seem to understand your business, my good woman," he began, unbuttoning his overcoat to get at the inside pocket of his cutaway.

"Why shouldn't I? I been at it these twenty years."

She had taken him in now, from his polished silk hat, gray hair, and red cheeks down to his check trousers, white spats, and well-brushed shoes. Her own face was by this time wreathed in smiles; she saw the man was a gentleman who had intended only to be courteous. "Is that what ye came to tell me?" she cried.

"No, but I would have done so if I had ever watched you work. Oh, here it is," he continued, drawing out his pocketbook. "I want you to—" he stopped and looked at her from over the rims of his gold spectacles—"but I may not have hold of the right person. May I ask if you belong here?"

Her head went up with a toss, her eyes dancing. "Of course ye can ask anything ye please, but I'll tell ye right off I don't belong here. Every blessed thing here belongs to me and my man John."

The passenger broke into a laugh. He had evidently found a *rara avis*, and was enjoying the discovery to the full. American types always interested him; this sample of Irish-New York was a revelation.

"Go on," smiled Kitty, "I'm waitin'."

"Well, take this order to No. 3 Gramercy Park, and they will give you my two boxes, a shirt case, a roll of steamer-rugs, and some golf-sticks in a leather pouch, five pieces in all. Get them down to the Cunard dock

by eleven, and my servant will be there to take charge of them. The steamer sails at twelve. Is that clear?"

She reached for the paper and began checking off the number of the apartment, number of pieces, dock, and hour. This was all that interested her.

"It is—clear as mud—and they'll be on time. And now, who's to pay?"

"I am, and—" He stopped suddenly, staring in blank amazement at Felix, who had just emerged from the side door and was stopping for a word with one of John's drivers. "My God!" he muttered in a low voice, as if talking to himself. "I can't be mistaken."

Felix nodded a good morning to Kitty and, with an alert, quick stride crossed the sidewalk diagonally, and bent his steps toward Kling's.

The Englishman followed him with his gaze, his open pocketbook still in his hands. "Is that gentleman a customer of yours?" Had he seen a dead man suddenly come to life he could not have been more astounded.

"He is, and pays his rent like one."

"Rent? For what?" The customer seemed completely at sea.

"For my up-stairs room. He's my lodger and I never had a better."

The Englishman caught his breath. "Do you know who he is?" he asked cautiously.

"Of course I do! Do you happen to know him?" John had moved up now and stood listening.

"Not personally, but, unless I am very much mistaken, that is Sir Felix O'Day."

"Ye ain't mistaken, you're dead right—all but the 'Sir.' That's somethin' new to me. It's *Mr.* Felix O'Day around here, and there ain't a finer nor a better. What do ye know about him?" Her voice had softened and a slight shade of anxiety had crept into it. John craned his head to hear the better.

"Nothing to his discredit. He has had a lot of trouble—terrible trouble—more than anybody I know. I heard he had gone to Australia. I see now that he came to New York. Well, upon my soul, Sir Felix living over an express office!"

He handed her a bill, waited until John had fished up the change from the trousers pocket, repeated, in an absent-minded way: "Sir Felix living here! Good God! What next?" and, beckoning to the driver, stepped inside the hansom and drove off.

Kitty looked at her husband, her color coming and going. "What did I tell ye, John, dear? And ye wouldn't believe a word of it."

John returned Kitty's look. He, too, was trying to grasp the full meaning of the announcement. "Are ye going to tell him ye know, Kitty?" Neither of them had the slightest doubt of its truth.

"No, I ain't," she flashed back. "Not a word—nor nobody else. When Mr. Felix O'Day gits ready to tell us, he will."

"Will ye tell Father Cruse?" he persisted.

"I don't know that I will. I'll have to think it over. And now, John, remember!—not a word of this to any livin' soul. Do ye promise?"

"I do." He hesitated, another question struggling to his lips, and then added: "What's up wid him, do ye think, Kitty?"

"I don't know, John, dear. I wish I did, but whatever it is, its breakin' his heart."

CHAPTER XI

The discovery of her lodger's title made but little difference to Kitty, nor did it raise him a whit in her estimation. At best, it only confirmed her first impression of his being a gentleman—every inch of him. She may have studied the more closely her lodger's habits, noting his constant care of his person, the way in which he used his knife and fork, the softness and cleanliness of his hands—all object-lessons to her, for she broke out on her husband the day after her talk with the Englishman in the hansom cab with:

"I want to tell ye that ye'll have to stop spatterin' yer soup around after this, John, dear. I'm going to have a clean table-cloth on every day, and a clean napkin for him, and as I'm doin' the washing myself ye've got to help an' not muss things. First thing ye know he'll sour on what we are giving him and be goin' off worse than ever, trampin' the streets till all hours of the night." At which John had stretched his big frame and with a prolonged yawn, his arms over his head, had remarked: "All right, Kitty, you're boss. Sir or no sir, he's got no frills about him—just plain man like the rest of us."

Neither would his title, had they known it, have made the slightest difference to any one of the habitués who gathered in Tim Kelsey's book-shop.

Who Felix was, or what he had done, or what he was about to do, were questions never considered, either by Kelsey or by his friends. That he was part of the driftwood left stranded and unrecognized on the intellectual shore was enough. All that any of them asked for was brains, and Felix, even before the first evening had ended, had uncovered a stock so varied, and of such unusual proportions, and of so brilliant a character that he was always accorded the right of way whenever he took charge of the talk.

And a queer lot they were who listened, and a queer lot they had to be, to enjoy Kelsey's confidence. "Men are like books," he would often say to Felix. "It is their insides I care for, no matter how badly they are bound. The half-calf or all-morocco sort never appeal to me. Shelf fellows seldom handled, I call them, and a man who is not handled and rubbed up against, with a corner worn off here and there, is like a book kept under glass. Nobody cares anything about it except as an ornament, and I have no room for ornaments."

That is why the door was kept shut at night, when some half-calf rapped and Tim would get a look at his binding through the shutter and tiptoe back, closing the door of the inner room behind him.

Among Kelsey's collection was old Silas Murford, the custom-house clerk—a fat, stupid-looking old fellow whose chin rested on his shirt-front and whose middle rested on his knees, the whole of him, when seated, filling Tim's biggest chair. Tim prized this volume

most, for when Silas began to talk, the sheepish look would fade out of his placid face, his little pig eyes would vanish, and the listener would discover to his astonishment that not only was this lethargic lump of flesh a delightful conversationalist but that he had spent every hour he could spare from his custom-house in a study of the American system of immigration—and had at his tongue's end a mass of statistics about which few men knew anything.

Crackburn, an authority on the earlier printers, then in charge of the prints in the Astor Library, and who, for diversion, ground lenses on the sly, was another prize document. And so was Lockwood, the lapidary, famous as a designer of medals and seals; and many more such oddities. "Fine old copies," Kelsey would say of them, "hand-printed, all of them; one or two, like old Silas, extremely rare."

That he considered Felix entitled to a place in his private collection had been decided at their first meeting. "Met a mask with a man behind it," he had announced to his intimates that same night. "Got a fine nose for what's worth having. Located that chant book as soon as he laid his hands on it. I didn't get any farther than the skin of his face and you won't, either. He has promised to come over, and when you have rubbed up against him for half an hour, as I did this morning, you will think as I do."

Since that time, Felix had spent many comforting hours in Kelsey's little back room. Sometimes he would drop in about nine and remain until half past

ten; at other times, it would be nearer midnight before he would turn the knob.

As for the shop itself, nothing up and down "The Avenue" was quite as odd, quite as ramshackly, or quite as picturesque. What the public saw, on either side of the down-two-steps entrance, was a bench with slanting shelves, holding a double row of books and two patched glass windows, protecting disordered heaps of prints, stained engravings, and old etchings, the whole embedded in dust.

What the owner's intimates saw, once they got inside and continued to the end of the building, was a low-ceiled room warmed by an old-fashioned Franklin stove and lighted by a drop covered by a green shade. All about were easy chairs, a table or two, a sideboard, some long shelves loaded down with books, and an iron safe which held some precious manuscripts and one or two early editions.

When the room was shut the shop was open, and when the shop was shut, the shutters fastened, and the two benches with their books lifted bodily and brought inside, the little back room, smoke-dried as an old ham, and as savory and inviting, once you got its flavor, was ready for his guests.

On one of these rare nights when the room was full, it happened that the same fifteenth-century chant book, which had brought Tim and Felix together, was lying on the table. The discussion which followed easily drifted into the influence of the Roman Catholic church on the art of the period; Felix maintain-

ing that but for the impetus it gave, neither the art of illumination nor any of the other arts would at the time have reached the heights they attained.

"This missal is but an example of it," he continued, drawing the battered, yellow-stained book toward him. "Whatever these old monks, with their religious fervor, touched they enriched and glorified, whether it were an initial letter, as you see here, or an altar-piece; and more than that, many of them painted wonderfully well."

"And a narrow-minded, bigoted lot they were," broke in Crackburn. "If they'd had their way there would not have been a printing-press in existence. If you are going to canonize anybody, begin with Aldus Minutius."

"Only a difference in patrons," chimed in Lockwood, "the difference between a pope and a doge."

"And it's the same to-day," echoed Kelsey, taking the book from O'Day's hand, to keep the leaves from buckling. "Only it's neither pope nor doge, but the money king who's the patron. We should all starve to death but for him. I've been waiting for Mr. O'Day to hunt one down and make him buy this," he added, closing the book carefully. "Nobody else around here appreciates its rarity or would give a five-dollar bill for it."

"Go slow," puffed old Silas, hunched up in his chair. "Money kings are good in their way, and so perhaps were popes and doges, but give me a plain priest every time. You wonder, Mr. O'Day, what those great

masters in art could have done without the protection of the church. I wonder what the poor of to-day would do without their priests. Go up to 28th Street and look in at St. Barnabas's. Its doors are open from before sunrise until near midnight. When you are in trouble, either hungry or hunted, and most of the poor are both, walk in and see what will happen. You'll find that a priest in New York is everything from a policeman to a hospital nurse, and he is always on his job. When nobody else listens, he listens; when nobody else helps, he holds out a hand. I haven't lived here sixty years for nothing."

"When you say 'listen,'" asked Felix, whose attention to the conversation had never wavered, "do you refer to the confessional?"

"I do not. That's the least part of it. So are the mass and the candles and choir-boys and the rest of the outfit, all very well in their way, for Sundays and fast-days, but just so much stage scenery to me, though its heaven to the poor devils who get color and music and restful quiet in contrast to their barren homes. But praying before the altar is only one-quarter of what these priests are doing every hour of the day and night. It's part of my business to follow them around, and I know. Hand me a light, Tim, my pipe's out."

Felix, being nearest the box, struck a match and held it close to Silas's bowl, a cloud of smoke rising between them. When it had cleared, O'Day remarked quietly: "Don't stop, Mr. Murford; go on, I am

listening. You have, as you said, only told us one-quarter of what these priests are doing. Where do the other three-quarters come in?"

Silas rapped the bowl against the arm of his chair to clear it the better, and, twisting his great bulk toward O'Day, said slowly: "If I tell you, will you listen and keep on listening until I get through?"

Felix bowed his head in acquiescence. The others, knowing what a story from Silas meant, craned their necks in his direction.

"Well! One night last winter—over on Avenue A, snow on the ground, mind you, and cold as Greenland—a row broke out on the third floor of a tenement house. In the snow on the sidewalk shivered a half-naked girl. She was sobbing. Her father had come in from his night shift at the gas house, crazy drunk, a piece of lead pipe in his hand.

"Two or three people had stopped, gazed at the girl, and passed her by. Tenement-house rows are too common in some districts to be bothered over. A policeman crossed the street, peered up the stairway, listened to the screams inside, looked the sobbing girl over, and kept on his way, swinging his club. A priest came along—one I know, a well-set-up man, who can take care of himself, no matter where. He touched the girl's arm and drew her inside the doorway, his head bent to hear her story. Then he went up—in jumps—two steps at a time—stumbling in the dark, picking himself up again, catching at the rail to help him mount the quicker, the screams over-

head increasing at every step. When he reached the door, it was bolted on the inside. He let drive with his shoulder and in it went. The girl's mother was crouching in the far corner of the room, behind a heavy sofa. The drunken husband stood over her, trying to get at her skull with the piece of lead pipe.

"At the bursting in of the door the brute wheeled and, with an oath, made straight for the priest, the weapon in his fist.

"The priest stepped clear of the door-jamb, moved under the single gas-jet, drew out his crucifix, and held it up.

"The drunkard stood staring.

"The priest advanced step by step. The brute cowered, staggered back, and fell in a heap on the floor."

"Magnificent," broke out Lockwood. "Superb! And well told. You would make a great actor, Murford."

"Perhaps," answered Silas with a reproving look, "but don't forget that it *happened*."

"I haven't a doubt of it," exclaimed Felix quietly, "but please go on, Mr. Murford. To me your story has only begun. What happened next?"

Silas's eyes glistened. Lockwood's criticism had gone over his head; he was accustomed to that sort of thing. What pleased him was the interest O'Day had shown in his pet subject—the sufferings of the poor being one of his lifelong topics of thought and conversation.

"The confessional happened next," replied Silas. "Then a sober husband, a sober wife, and a girl at

work—and they are still at it—for I got the man a job as night-watchman in the custom-house, at Father Cruse's request."

Felix started forward. "You surely don't mean Father Cruse of St. Barnabas's?" he exclaimed eagerly.

"Exactly."

"Was it he who burst in that door?"

"It was, and there isn't a tramp or a stranded girl within half a mile of where we sit that he doesn't know and take care of. So I say you can have your money kings and your popes and your doges; as for me, I'll take Father Cruse every time, and there's dozens just like him."

Felix pushed back his chair, reached for his hat, said good night in his usual civil tone, and left the shop, Murford merely nodding at him over the bowl of his pipe, the others taking no notice of his departure. It was the way they did things at Kelsey's. There were no great welcomings when they arrived and no good-bys when they parted. They would meet again the next night, perhaps the next morning—and more extended courtesies were considered unnecessary.

All the way back to Kitty's the erect figure of Father Cruse, holding the emblem of his faith in that dimly lighted room stood out clear. He wondered why he had not seen more of the man whose courage and faith he himself had dimly recognized at their first meeting, and determined to cultivate his acquaintance at once. Long ago he had promised Kitty to do so. He would keep that promise by timing his visit so as to reach

St. Barnabas's when the service was over. The balance of the evening could then be spent with the father.

He glanced at his watch and a glow of satisfaction spread over his face as he noted the hour. Kitty would be up, and he would have the opportunity of delighting her with the details of the tribute Murford had paid her beloved priest. The more he pictured the effect upon her, the lighter grew his heart.

He began before the knob of the sitting-room had left his hand and had gone as far as: "Oh I heard something about a friend of yours who—" when she checked him by rising to her feet and exclaiming:

"Hold on a minute and listen to me first. I have something that belongs to ye. I found it after ye'd gone out, and ran after ye. I thought ye'd miss it and come back. I wonder ye didn't. Ye see I was tidyin' up yer room, and yer brush dropped down behind the bureau; and when I pushed it out from the wall I found this under the edge of the carpet. Ye better keep these little things in the drawer." Her hand was in the capacious pocket of her apron as she spoke, her plump fingers feeling about its depths. "Oh, here it is," she cried. "I was gettin' nigh scared ter death fer fear I'd lost it. Here, give me your cuff and I'll put it in fer ye."

"What is it? A cuff button?" he asked, controlling his disappointment but biding his time.

"Yes, and a good one."

"I'm sorry, Mistress Kitty, but it cannot be mine," he returned with a smile. "I have but one pair, and

both buttons are in place, as you can see," and he held out his cuffs.

"Well, then, who can this one belong to? Take a look at it. It's got arms on one button and two letters mixed up together on the other," and she dropped it into his hand.

Felix held the sleeve-links to the light, smothered a cry and, with a quick movement of his hands, steadied himself by the table.

"Where did you get this?" he breathed rather than spoke.

"I just told ye. Down behind the bureau where ye dropped it, along with your hair-brush."

Felix tightened his fingers, straining the muscles of his arms, striving with all his might to keep his body from shaking. He had his back to her, his face toward the lamp, and had thus escaped her scrutiny. "I haven't lost it," he faltered, prolonging the examination to gain time and speaking with great deliberation.

"Ye haven't! Oh, I am that disappointed! And ye didn't drop it? Well, then, who did drop it?" she cried, looking over his shoulder. She had been thinking all the evening how pleased he would be when she returned it, and in her chagrin had not noticed the mental storm he was trying to master.

"And ye're sure ye didn't drop it?" she reiterated.

"Quite sure," he answered slowly, his face still in the shadow, the link still in his hand.

"Well, that's the strangest thing I ever heard! We don't have nobody—we ain't never had nobody up in

that room with things on 'em like that. The fellow that John and I fired didn't have no sleeve-buttons."

"Perhaps somebody else may have dropped it," he answered, sinking into a chair. He was devouring her face, trying to read behind her eyes, praying she would go on, yet fearing to prolong the inquiry lest she should discover his agitation.

"No, there ain't nobody," she said at last, "and if there was there wouldn't— Stop! Hold on a minute, I got it! You've bin here six months or more, ain't ye?"

Felix nodded, his eyes still fastened on her own. A nod was better than the spoken word until his voice obeyed him the better.

"An' ye ain't had a soul in that room but yerself since ye've been here? Is that true?"

Again Felix nodded.

"Of course it's true, whether ye say it or not. What a fool I was to ask ye! I got it now. That sleeve-link belongs to a poor creature who slept in that room three or four days before ye come and skipped the next morning."

Felix's fingers tightened on the arm of the chair. For the moment it seemed to him as if he were swaying with the room. "Some one you were kind to, I suppose," he said, lifting a hand to shade his face, the words coming one at a time, every muscle in his body taut.

"What else could we do? Leave the poor thing out in the cold and wet?"

"It was, then, some one you picked up, was it not?" The room had stopped swaying and he was beginning to breathe evenly again. He saw that he had not betrayed himself. Her calm proved it; and so did the infinite pity that crept into her tones as she related the incident.

"No, some one Tom McGinniss picked up on his beat, or would have picked up hadn't John and I come along. And that wet she was, and everything streamin' puddles, an' she, poor dear, draggled like a dog in the gutter."

Felix's sheltering hand sagged suddenly, exposing for a moment his strained face and wide-open eyes.

"I didn't understand it was a woman," he stammered, turning his head still farther from the light of the lamp.

"Yes, of course, it was a woman, and a lady, too. That's what I've been a-tellin' ye. Here, take my seat if that light gets into your eyes. I see it's botherin' ye. It's that red shade that does it. It sets John half crazy sometimes. I'll turn it down. Well, that's better. Yes, a lady. An' she wet as a rat an' all the heart out of her. An' that link ye got in yer hand is hers and nobody else's. John and I had been to evening service at St. Barnabas's, an' we hung on behind till everybody had gone so as to have a word with Father Cruse, after he had taken off his vestments. We bid him good night, come out of the 29th Street door, and kept on toward Lexington Avenue. We hadn't gone but a little way from the church, when

John, who was walking ahead, come up agin Tom McGinniss. He was stooping over a woman huddled up on them big front steps before you get to the corner.

"'What are you doin', Tom?' says John.

"'It's a drunk,' he says, 'an I'll run her in an' she'll sleep it off and be all the better in the mornin'.'

"'Let me take a look at her, Tom,' says I; an' I got close to her breath and there was no more liquor inside her than there is in me this minute.

"'You'll do nothin' of the kind, Tom McGinniss,' says I. 'This poor thing is beat out with cold and hunger. Give her to me. I'll take her home. Get hold of her, John, an' lift her up.'

"If ye'd 'a' seen her, Mr. O'Day, it would have torn ye all to pieces. The life and spirit was all out of her. She was like a child half asleep, that would go anywhere you took her. If I'd said, 'Come along, I'm goin' to drown ye,' she'd 'a' come just the same. Not one word fell out of her mouth. Just went along between us, John an' I helpin' her over the curbs and gutters until she got to this kitchen, an' I sat her down in that chair, close by the stove, and began to dry her out, for her dress was all soaked in the mud and streamin' with water. I got some hot coffee into her, an' found a pair of John's old shoes, an' put 'em on her feet till I had dried her own, an' when she got so she could speak —not drunk, mind ye, nor doped; just dazed like as if she had been hunted and had given up all hope. She said like a sick child speakin': 'You've been very kind, and I'm very grateful. I'll go now.'

"'No, ye won't,' I says; 'ye'll stay where ye are. Ye don't leave this place to-night. Ye'll go up-stairs and git into my bed.' She looked at me kind o' scared-like; then she looked at John an' our big man Mike who had come in while I was dryin' her out, but I stopped that right away. 'No, ye needn't worry,' I said, 'an' ye won't. Ye're just as safe here as ye would be in your mother's arms. Ye ain't the first one my man John an' I have taken care of, an' ye won't be the last. Take another sip o' that hot coffee, an' come with me.'

"Well, we got her up-stairs, an' I helped her undress, an' when I unhooked her skirt an' it fell to the floor, I saw what I was up aginst. She had the finest pair of silk stockings on her feet ye ever seen in your life, and her petticoat was frills up to her knees. She said nothin' an' I said nothin'. 'Git in,' I said, an' I turned down the cover and come out. The next mornin' the boys had to get over to Hoboken, an' I was up before daylight and then back to bed again. At seven o'clock I went to her room and pushed in the door. She was gone, an' I've never seen her since. That cuff-link's hers. Take it up-stairs with ye an' put it in the wash-stand drawer. I'll lose it if I keep it down here, an' she's bound to come back for it some day. What time is it? Twelve o'clock, if I'm alive! Well, then, I'm goin' to bed, and you're goin', too. John's got his key, and there's his coffee, but he won't be long now."

Felix sat still. Only when she had finished busying herself about the room making ready to close the

place for the night did he rouse himself. So still was he, and so absorbed that she thought he had fallen alseep, until she became aware of a flash from under the overhanging brows and heard him say, as if speaking to himself: "It was very good of you. Yes, very good—of you—to do it, and—I suppose she never came back?"

"She never did," returned Kitty, drawing a chair away from the heat of the stove, "and I'm that sorry she didn't. I'll fix the lights when ye've gone up. Good night to ye."

"Good night, Mrs. Cleary," and he left the room.

In the same absorbed way he mounted the stairs, opened his own door and, without turning up the gas, sank heavily into a chair, the link still held fast in his hand. A moment later he sprang from his seat, stepped quickly to the gas-jet, turned up the light, and held one of the small buttons to the flame, as if to reassure himself of the initials; then with a smothered cry fell across the narrow bed, his face hidden in the quilt.

For an hour he lay motionless, his mind a seething caldron, above which writhed distorted shapes who hid their faces as they mounted upward. When these vanished and a certain calm fell upon him, two figures detached themselves and stood clear: a woman cowering on a door-step, her skirts befouled with the slime of the streets, and a priest with hand upraised, his only weapon the symbol of his God.

CHAPTER XII

The morning brought him little relief. He drank his coffee in comparative silence and crossed the street to his work with only a slight bend of his head toward Kitty, who was helping Mike tag some baggage. She noticed then how pale he was and the wan smile that swept over his face as she waved her hand at him in answer, but she was too busy over the trunks to give the subject further thought.

Masie was waiting for him in the back part of the shop, which, by the same old process of moving things around, had been fitted up into a sort of private office for Kling, two high-back settles serving for one wall, three bureaus for another, while some Spanish chairs, a hair-cloth sofa studded with brass nails, an inlaid table, and a Daghestan rug helped to make it secluded and attractive. Kling liked the new arrangement because he could keep one eye on his books and the other on the front door, thus killing two birds with one stone. Masie loved it because when Felix had so many customers that he could neither talk nor play with her, it served her as a temporary refuge—as would a shelter until the rain was over—and Felix delighted in it because it kept Kling out of the way, the good-natured Dutchman having often spoiled a sale by what Felix called "inopportune remarks at opportune moments."

Although Masie's business on this particular morning was nothing more important than merely saying good-by to her "Uncle Felix" before she went to school, her wee stub of a nose had, until she saw him cross the street, been flattened against the glass of her father's front door, her two eager, anxious eyes fixed on Kitty's sidewalk. Felix was over an hour late, something which had never happened before and something which could not have happened now unless he had either overslept himself—an unbelievable fact, or was ill—a calamity which could not be thought of for a moment.

While a nod and a faint smile had done for Kitty, and a "No, I was not very well last night," had sufficed for Kling, whose eyebrows made the inquiry—he never finding fault with O'Day for lapses of any kind—the case was far different when it came to Masie. The little lady had to be coaxed into one of the easy chairs in the improvised office and comforted with an arm around her shoulder, to say nothing of having her hair smoothed back from her face, followed by a kiss on her white forehead, before her overwrought anxieties were allayed.

That he was not himself was apparent to every one. Masie was still sure of it when she bade him good-by, and Kling became convinced of it long before the day was over. As the afternoon wore on, however, he grew calmer. His indomitable will began to reassert itself. His manner became more alert, and his glance clearer.

When he found himself able to think, he determined that his first move must be to find Carlin, and that

very night. It had been some weeks since he had visited the ship-chandler. He had tried the latch several times, and would have repeated his visits had not a bystander told him that Carlin was in the country fitting out a yacht for one of his customers and would not be back for a month. The time was now up.

And yet, when he thought it all over, could he, in view of this new phase of the case, seek Carlin's help and advice? What might be better—and his heart gave a bound—would be to see Father Cruse. The woman whom Kitty had picked up might be one of his waifs, who, overcome by fatigue or illness after leaving the church, had fallen on the door-step where the policeman had found her.

At six o'clock he left the shop with a formal good night to Kling, a hasty, almost abrupt good-by to Masie, and, without a word of any kind to Kitty, whose quiet scrutiny he dreaded, bent his steps to a small eating-room in the basement of one of the old-time private houses in Lexington Avenue, where he sometimes took his meals. At seven o'clock he was threading his way through the crowds in Third Avenue, searching the face of every one he met. At eight o'clock, his impatience growing, he turned into 28th Street and mounted the short flight of steps in front of St. Barnabas's. The tones of the organ, as well as the illumined stained-glass windows and the groups of people around the swinging doors of the vestibule, showed that a service was being held. These, however, were the only evidences that a body of people had met to

pray inside, both pavements outside being filled with hurrying throngs, as were the barrooms opposite, crowded with loud-talking men lining the bars, with here and there a woman at a table.

Passing through the vestibule doors, he entered the church and found a seat near the entrance. Father Cruse, in full vestments, was officiating. He was before the altar at the moment, his back to the congregation. Most of them were working people who had only their evenings free, and for whom these services were held: girls from the department stores, servants with an evening out, trainmen from the Elevated, off duty for an hour or two, small storekeepers whose places closed early, with their wives and children beside them, all under the spell of the hushed interior. Some prayed without moving, their heads bowed; others kept their eyes fixed on the priest. One or two had their faces turned toward the choir-loft, completely absorbed in the full, deep tones that rolled now and then through the responses.

Nothing of all this impressed Felix at first. He had always regarded the Roman Catholic church as embodying a religion adapted only to the ignorant and the superstitious. But, as he looked about on the rapt body of worshippers, he suddenly wondered if there were not something in its beliefs, forms, and ceremonies that he had hitherto missed.

The wonder grew upon him as he watched the worshippers, his eyes resting now on a figure of a woman on her knees before the small altar at his left, her half-

naked baby flat on its back beside her; and again that of an unkempt gray-haired man, his clothes old and ragged, his body bent, his lips trembling in supplication. All at once, and for the first time in his life, he began to realize the existence of a something all-powerful, to which these people appealed, a something beneficent which swept their faces free of care, as a light drives out darkness, and sent them home with new hope and courage. Religion had played no part in his life. From his boyhood he had made his fight without it. Had they tried and failed and, disheartened in their failure, sought at last for higher help, realizing that no one man was strong enough to make the fight of life alone?

As he asked himself these questions, the personality of the priest began to exert its influence over him. He followed his movements, the dignity and solemnity with which he exercised his functions, the reverential tones of his voice, the adoration shown in his every act and gesture. And as he watched there arose another question—one he had often debated within himself: Were these people about him calmed and rested by the magnetic personality of the big-chested, strong-armed man; were they aided by the seductions of music, incense, and color, including the very vestments that hung from his broad shoulders; or did the calm and rest and aid proceed from a source infinitely higher, more powerful, more compelling, as had been shown in the case of the would-be murderer cowed by the sight of a sacred emblem? And if there were two personali-

ties, two influences, two dominant powers, one of man and the other of God, which one had he, Felix O'Day, come here to invoke?

At this mental question, the more practical side of his nature came to the fore.

"Neither of them," he said firmly to himself, "neither God nor priest." What he had come for had nothing to do with religion or with its forms. A woman had been found lying on a door-step near this church, who might have attended the same evening service. If so, Father Cruse might have seen her—no doubt knew her, in fact, must have both seen and recognized her. She was the kind of woman whom Murford said Father Cruse helped. What he was here for was to ask the priest a simple, straightforward question. This over, he would continue on his way.

Then a sudden check arose. How was he to describe this woman? He had not dared probe Kitty for any further details than those she had given him. To waste therefore, the valuable time of Father Cruse with no more information than he at present possessed would be as inconsiderate as it was foolish.

With this new view of the difficulty confronting him, he reached for his hat, so as to be ready at the first break in the service to tiptoe noiselessly out. He would then go back to Kitty and, without exciting her suspicions, learn something more of the outward appearance of the object of her tender sympathy.

As he was about to leave the pew, the tones of a tiny bell were heard through the aisles. Instantly a

deep, almost breathless, silence fell upon the church. The penitents, who were on their knees beneath the clusters of candles lighting the side chapels, remained motionless; those in the seats bowed their heads, their foreheads resting on the backs of the pews.

As he listened with lowered head, a dull, scuffling sound was heard near the swinging doors of the vestibule, as if some one were being roughly handled. Then an angry voice, "she shan't go in!" followed by high-pitched, defiant tones: "Get out of my way. I shan't go in, shan't I? I'd like to see you or anybody else keep me out! This place is free, and so am I. Jim hasn't showed up, and I'm going to wait for him here. I've got a date."

She was abreast of Felix now, a girl of twenty, maudlin drunk, her hat awry, her hair in a frowse, her dress open at the neck.

She steadied herself for a moment, and became conscious of Felix, who had risen, horror-stricken, from his seat.

"Jim ain't showed up. He is all right, and don't you forget it. Them guys wanted to give me the grand bounce, but I got a date, see?"

She reeled on up the aisle until she reached the steps of the altar. There she stood, swaying before the lights, repeating her cry: "They dassen't touch me. I got a date, I tell you!"

Father Cruse, without turning, continued his ministrations with the same composure he would have maintained at a baptism had its solemnity been dis-

turbed by the cry of a child. By this time, several women, appalled by the sacrilege, left their seats and moved toward her, begging, then commanding, her to stop talking, all fearing to add to the noise yet not daring to let it continue, until they gently but firmly pushed her through the door at the end of the church and so on into the street.

Felix had followed every movement of the girl with an intensity that almost paralyzed his senses. He had looked into her bloodshot eyes, noted the hard lines drawn around the corners of her mouth, the coarse, painted lips, dry hair, and sunken cheeks. He had heard her harsh laugh and caught the glint of her drunken leer. A cold shiver swept through him. It was as if he had stepped on a flat stone covering a grave which had tilted beneath his feet, revealing a corpse but a few months buried. Had he been anywhere else he would have sunk to the floor—not to pray, but to rest his knees, which seemed giving out under him.

When service was over, he made his way down the aisle, waited until the last of the worshippers had had their final word with their priest, and, with a respectful bend of the head in recognition, followed Father Cruse into the sacristy.

"You remember me?" he said in a hoarse, constrained voice when the priest turned and faced him.

"Yes, you are Mr. O'Day—Kitty Cleary's friend, and I need not tell you how glad I am to see you," and he held out a cordial hand.

"I have come as I promised you I would. Can you give me half an hour?"

"With the greatest pleasure. My duties are over just as soon as I put these vestments away. But I am sorry you came to-night, for you have witnessed a most distressing sight."

Felix looked at him steadily. "Do such things happen often?" he asked, his voice breaking.

"Everything happens here, Mr. O'Day," replied the priest gravely; "incredible things. We once found a baby a month old in the gallery. We baptized him and he is now one of our choir-boys. But, forgive me," he added with a smile, "such sights are best forgotten and may not interest you." He was studying his visitor as a doctor does a patient, trying to discover the seat of the disease. That Felix was not the same man he had met the night at Kitty's was apparent; then he had been merely a man with a sorrow, now he seemed laboring under a weight too heavy to bear.

Felix drew back his shoulders as if to brace himself the better and said: "Can we talk here?"

"Yes, and with absolute privacy and freedom. Take this chair; I will sit beside you." It was the voice of the father confessor now, encouraging the unburdening of a soul.

Felix glanced first around the simple room, with its quiet and seclusion, then stepped back and closed the sacristy door, saying, as he took his seat: "There is no need, I suppose, of locking it?"

"Not the slightest."

For a moment he sat with head bowed, one hand pressed to his forehead. The priest waited, saying nothing.

"I have come to you, Father Cruse, because I need a man's help—not a priest's—a *man's*. If I have made no mistake, you are one."

The fine white fingers of the priest were rising and falling ever so slightly on the velvet arm of the chair on which his hand rested, a compound gesture showing that both his brain and his hand were at his listener's service.

"Go on," he said gently and firmly. "As priest or man, Mr. O'Day, I am ready."

Felix paused; the priest bent his head in closer attention. He was accustomed to halting confessions, and ready with a prompting word if the sinner faltered.

"It is about my wife."

The words seemed to choke him, as if the grip of a long-held silence had not yet quite relaxed its hold.

"Not ill, I hope?"

"No, she is not ill."

The priest leaned forward, a startled look on his face. "You surely don't mean she is dead?"

O'Day did not answer.

Father Cruse settled back into the depths of his chair. "She has left you, then," he said in a conclusive tone.

"Yes—a year ago."

He stopped, started to speak, and, with a baffled gesture, said: "No, you might better have it all. It is the only way you will understand; I will begin at the beginning."

The priest laid his hand soothingly on O'Day's wrist. "Take your time. I have nothing else to do except to listen and—help you if I can."

The touch of the priest had steadied him. "Thank you, Father," he said simply, and went on.

"A year ago, as I have said, my wife left me and went off with a man named Dalton. Later I learned she was here, and I came over to see what I could do to help her."

Father Cruse raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"Yes, just that—to help her when she needed help, for I knew she would need it sooner or later. She was not a bad woman when she left me, and she is not now, unless he has made her so. She is only an easily persuaded, pleasure-loving woman, and when my father was forced into bankruptcy and we all suffered together, she blamed me for giving up what money I had in trying to straighten out his affairs; and then our infant daughter died, and that so upset her mind that when Dalton came along she let everything go. That is one solution of it—the one which her friends give out. I will tell you the truth. It is that I was twenty years older than she, that she loved me as a young girl loves an older man who had been brought up almost in her own family, for our properties adjoined, and that when she woke up, it was to find

out that I was not the man she would have married had she been given a few more years' time in which to make up her mind.

"When she ran away I lost my bearings. I used to sit in my room in the club for hours at a time, staring at the morning paper, never seeing the print; thinking only of my wife and our life together—all of it, from the day we were married. I recalled her childish nature, her fits of sudden temper always ending in tears, and her wilfulness. Then my own responsibility loomed up. To let this child go to the devil would be a crime. When this idea became firmly set in my mind, I determined to follow her no matter what she had done or where she had gone.

"I had meant to go to Australia and look after sheep—I knew something about them—but I changed my plans when I overheard a conversation at my club and concluded that Dalton had brought her here—although the conversation itself was only the repetition of a rumor. Since then I have found out that they are both here, or were some six months ago.

"You can understand, now, why I am living at Mrs. Cleary's and working in Mr. Kling's store. I had but a few pounds left after paying my passage and there was no one from whom I could borrow, even if I had been so disposed; so work of some kind was necessary. It may be just as well for me to tell you, too, that nobody at home knows where I am, and that but two persons in New York know me at all. One is a man named Carlin, who served on one of my father-

in-law's vessels, and the other is his sister Martha, who was a nurse in my wife's family.

"Dalton, so I understood, had considerable money when he left, enough to last him some months, and until yesterday I have hunted for them where I thought he would be sure to spend it, in the richer cafés and restaurants, outside the opera-houses and the fashionable theatres—places where two strangers in the city would naturally spend their evenings, and a woman loving light and color as she did would want to go.

"All these theories were upset last night when Mrs. Cleary gave me some details of a woman she had picked up near your church. She found her, it seems, some months ago—last April, in fact—on the steps of a private house near your church—here on 29th Street—took her home and made her spend the night there. In the morning she disappeared without any one seeing her. Yesterday, while moving the bureau in my room, Mrs. Cleary found a sleeve-link on the carpet; she thought it was one I had dropped. I have it in my trunk. It is one of a pair my wife gave me on my birthday, the year we were married. I missed it from my jewel case after she left, and thought somebody had stolen it. Now I know that my wife must have taken it, and then dropped it at Mrs. Cleary's. So I came here to-night hoping against hope—it was so many months ago—to get some further information regarding her. Then I remembered that I had not asked Mrs. Cleary what the woman looked like, and I was about to return home, when that poor girl

staggered in, and I got a look at her face. I lost my hold on myself then and——"

He sprang to his feet and began striding across the room, his eyes blazing, one clinched fist upraised: "By God! Father Cruse, I know something of Dalton's earlier life and of what he is capable. And I tell you right here, that if he has brought my wife to that, I shall kill him the moment I set my eyes on him. To take a child of a woman, foolish and vain as she was—stupid if you will—and—" he halted, covered his face in his hands, and broke into sobs.

During the long recital Father Cruse had neither spoken nor moved. He was accustomed to such outbursts, but it had been many years since he had seen so strong a man weep as bitterly. Better let the storm pass—he would master himself the sooner.

A full minute elapsed, and then, with a groan that seemed to come from the depths of his being, O'Day lifted his head, brushed the hot tears from his eyes, and continued:

"You must forgive me, for I am utterly broken up. But I can't go on any longer this way! I have got to let go—I have got to talk to somebody. That dear woman with whom I live is kindness itself and would do anything she could for me, but somehow I cannot tell her about these things. I may be wrong about it—but I was born that way. You know black from white—you live here right in the midst of it—you see it every day. Mr. Silas Murford told me the other night at Kelsey's that you knew everybody in this neighbor-

hood, and so I came to you. Help me find my wife!"

Father Cruse drew his chair closer and laid his hand soothingly on O'Day's knee.

"It is unnecessary for me to tell you I will help you," he answered in his low, smooth voice: "And now let us get to work systematically and see what can be done. I will begin by asking you a few questions. What sort of a looking woman is your wife?"

Felix straightened himself in his chair, felt in his inside pocket, and took from it a colored photograph. "As you see, she is rather small, with fair hair, blue eyes, and a slight figure—the usual English type. She has very beautiful teeth—very white—teeth you would never forget once you saw them; and she has quite small ears and, although the picture does not show this, small hands and feet."

"And how would she dress now? This evidently was taken some years ago. I mean, what was her habit of dress? Would it be such as an Englishwoman would wear?"

Felix pondered. "Well, when Lady Barbara left she had——"

An expression of surprise on the priest's face cut short the sentence. O'Day looked at him in a startled way; then he recalled his words.

"Pardon me, but it is only fair that you should know that Lady Barbara is the daughter of Lord Carnavon, and that since my father's death they call me Sir Felix. I have never used the title here and may

never use it anywhere. I would have assumed some other name when I arrived here, except that I could not bring myself to give up my own and my father's —he never did anything to disgrace it. He was caught in a trap, that is all, and I signed away everything I could to help him out. He stood by me when I was in India, and when he had a shilling he gave me half. I would rather have died, much as my wife blamed me, than not to have done what I did.

"And I would do it all over again, although I did not realize how big the load was until settling-day came. Dalton was at the bottom of it all. He floated the company. There was a story going around the clubs that he had got me into squaring it all up, knowing that I would be done for, and he could get away with her easier, but I never believed it. He has come into his own, if this wretched, suffering woman that Mrs. Cleary picked up is my wife; and I will come into mine"—here his eyes flashed—"if he has dragged her down and——"

Father Cruse again laid his quieting fingers this time on Felix's wrist.

"He has not dragged her down, Mr. O'Day. Of that you may be sure. A woman of her class doesn't go to pieces in a year. When she reaches the end of her means she will either seek work or she will go to one of the institutions to wait until she can hear from her people at home. I have known——"

Felix shook his head with an impatient movement. "You don't know her," he exclaimed excitedly, "nor

do you know her family. Her father has shut his door against her, and would step across her body if he found it on the sidewalk rather than recognize her. Nor would she ask him for a penny, nor let him or me or any one else know of her misery."

Again the priest sat silent. He did not attempt to defend his theory—some better way of calming his visitor must be found. He merely said, as if entirely convinced by O'Day's denial: "Oh, well, we will let that go, perhaps you know best"; and then added, his voice softening, "and now one word more, before we go into the details of our search, so that no complications may arise in the future. You, of course, are hunting for Lady Barbara to reinstate her as your wife if——"

O'Day sprang from his chair and stood over the priest. The suggestion had come as a blow.

"I will take her back!"

The priest looked up in astonishment. "Yes, is it not so?"

The answer came between closed teeth. "I did not expect that of you, Father Cruse, I thought you were bigger—*much* bigger. Can't you understand how a man may want to stand by a woman for herself alone without dragging in his own selfishness and— No, I forgot—you cannot understand—you never held a woman in your arms—you do not realize her many weaknesses, her childishness, her whims, her helplessness. But take her back? *Never!* That chapter in my life is closed. My hunt for her all these months

has been to save her from herself and from the scoundrel who has ruined her. When that is done I shall pick up my life as best I can, but not with her."

For some seconds the priest did not speak. Then he said gently, again avoiding any disagreement. "Let us hope that so happy an ending to all your sufferings is not far off, my dear Mr. O'Day. And now another question before we part for the night, one I perhaps ought to have asked you before. Are you quite positive that Kitty's visitor was your wife?"

He had reserved this hopeful suggestion—one he himself believed in—for the last. It would help lift the dead weight of bitter anxiety which was sure to overwhelm his visitor in the wakeful hours of the night.

Felix moved impatiently, like one combating a physician's cheering words. "It must have been she, who else could have dropped the sleeve-link?"

"Several people. Excuse me if I talk along different lines, but I have had a good deal of experience in tracing out just such things as this, and I have always found it safest to be sure of my facts before deducing theories. It is not all clear to me that Kitty's woman dropped the links. And even if she did, the fact is no proof that the woman is your wife."

"But the links are mine. There is no question of it—my initials and arms are cut into them." The impatience was gone and a certain curiosity was manifesting itself.

"Quite true, and yet you once thought the links

were stolen. So let us presume for the present that they were stolen and that this woman either bought them, or was given them, or found them."

Felix began pacing the floor, a gleam of hope illumining the dark corners of his heart. The interview, too, had calmed him—as do all confessions.

The priest settled back in his seat. He saw that the crisis had passed. There might be another outburst in the future, but it would not have the intensity of the one he had just witnessed. He waited until Felix was opposite his chair and then asked, in a low voice: "Well, may I not be right, Mr. O'Day?"

Felix paused in his walk and gazed down at the priest. "I don't know," he answered slowly. "My head is not clear enough to think it out. Mrs. Cleary might help unravel it. She saw her and will remember. Shall I sound her when I go home—not to excite her suspicions, of course, but so as to find out whether her visitor were large or small—details like that?"

"No, I will ask her, and in a way not to make her suspect. She will think I am hunting for one of my own people. It is wiser that she should not know yet what you have told me. I would rather wait for the time when this poor creature, whoever she is, needs a sister's tenderness. She will get it there, for no finer woman lives than Kitty Cleary."

A sigh of intense relief escaped Felix. "And now tell me where you will begin your hunt?" he asked, one of his old search-light glances flashing from beneath his brows.

"Nowhere in particular. On the East Side, perhaps, where I have means of knowing what strangers come and go. Then among my own people here. I shall know within twenty-four hours whether she has been in the habit of attending evening service—that is, within the last six months. A woman of the poorer class would be difficult to locate, but there should not be the slightest trouble in picking out one who, less than a year ago, occupied your wife's social position—no matter how badly she were dressed."

Felix stood musing. He had reached the limit of the help he had come for.

"And what can I do to assist?"

"Nothing. Go home, and when I need you I will send word. Good night."

CHAPTER XIII

Had Felix continued his visits to Stephen Carlin's shop, he might have escaped many sleepless hours and saved himself many weary steps.

Fate had doubtless dealt him one of those unlucky cards which we so often find in our hands when the game of life is being played. If, for instance, the book to the right, holding the lost will, had been opened instead of the book to the left; or if we had caught the wrecked train by a minute or less; or had our penny come up heads instead of coming up tails: how many of the ills of life would have been avoided? And so I say that had Felix continued his visits to Stephen as he should have done, he would, one December afternoon, have found the ship-chandler standing in the door, spectacles on his nose, checking off a wagon-load of manila rope which had just been discharged on his pavement, stopping only to nod to the postman who had brought him a letter. The delay in breaking the seal was due entirely to the fact that a coil of light cordage, used aboard the yachts he was accustomed to fit out, had just been reported as missing, and so the unopened letter was tossed on top a barrel of sperm-oil to await his convenience. But it was when Stephen caught sight of the small cramped writing scrawled over the cheap yellow envelope, the

stamp askew, his own name and address crowded in the lower left-hand corner, that the supreme moment really arrived, for at that instant—had Felix been there —he would have seen Carlin slit the covering with his thumb-nail, lay aside his invoice, and drop on the first seat within reach, to steady himself.

Indeed, had Felix on this same December afternoon surprised him even an hour later, say at six o'clock, which he could very well have done, for Carlin did not close his shop until seven, he would have come upon him with the same letter in his hand, his whole mind absorbed in its contents, especially the last paragraph: "Be here at seven o'clock, sharp; don't ring the bell below, just rap twice and I shall know it is you. I have to be very careful who I let in."

It had been several weeks since Carlin had heard from his sister. She had called at the store on her return from Canada, where she had spent the summer, and he had helped her find a small suite of rooms on a side street off St. Mark's Place, which she subsequently occupied, but since then she had never crossed his threshold. At first she had kept him advised of her nursing engagements—the days when her work carried her out of town, or the addresses of those who needed her in the city. These brief communications having entirely ceased, he had decided in his anxiety to look her up and, strange to say, on that very night. That his hand trembled and his rough, weather-browned face became tinged with color as he read her letter to

the end, turning the page and reading the whole a second time, would have surprised anybody who knew the stern, silent old sailor. His clerk, a thin, long-necked young man wearing a paper collar and green necktie, noticed his agitation and guessed wrong—Carlin being a confirmed old bachelor. And so did the driver of the wagon, who had to wait for his receipt and who, wondering at Stephen's emotion, would have asked what the letter was all about had not the ship-chandler, after consulting his watch, crammed the envelope into his side pocket, jumped to his feet, and shouted to the Paper Collar to "roll the stuff off that sidewalk and get everything stowed away, as he was going up to St. Mark's Place."

Here and there in the whir of the great city a restful breathing-spot is found, its stretch of grass dotted with moss-covered tombs grouped around a low-pitched church. At certain hours the sound of bells is heard and the low rhythm of the organ throbbing through the aisles. Then lines of quietly dressed worshippers stroll along the bordered walks, the children's hands fast in their mothers' the arched vestibule-door closing upon them.

Most of these oases, like Trinity, St. Paul's, and St. Mark's, differ but little—the same low-pitched church, the same slender spire, the same stretch of green with its scattered gravestones. And, outside, the same old demon of hurry, defied and hurled back by a lifted hand armed with the cross.

Of these three breathing-spaces, St. Mark's is, perhaps, a little greener in the early spring, less dusty in the summer heat, less bare and uninviting in the winter snow. It is more restful, too, than the others, a place in which to sit and muse—even to read. Out from its shade and sunshine run queer side streets, with still queerer houses, rising two stories and an attic, each with a dormer and huge chimney. Dried-up old aristocrats, these, living on the smallest of pensions, taking toll of notaries public, shyster lawyers, peddlers of steel pens, die-cutters, and dismal real-estate agents in dismal offices boasting a desk, two chairs, and a map.

Stephen's course lay in the direction of one of these relics of better days—a wide-eyed house with a pieced-out roof, flattened like an old woman's wig over a sloping forehead, the eyebrows of eaves shading two blinking windows. A most respectable old dowager of a building, no doubt, in its time, with the best of Madeira and the choicest of cuts going down two steps into its welcoming basement. That was before the iron railings were covered with rust and before the three brownstone steps leading to the front door were worn into scoops by heavy shoes; before the polished mahogany doors were replaced by pine and painted a dull, dirty green; before the banisters with their mahogany rail were as full of cavities as a garden fence with half its palings gone; and before—long before—some vulgar Paul Pry had cut a skylight in the hipped roof, through which he could peer, taking note of whatever went on inside the gloomy interior: each of these

several calamities but so much additional testimony to its once grand estate, and every one of them but so many steps in its downward career.

For it had become anything but a happy house—this old dowager dwelling of the long ago. Indeed, it was a very mournful and most depressing house, and so were its tenants. In the basement was a barber who spent half his time lounging about inside the small door, without his white jacket, waiting for customers. On the first-floor-back there was a music-teacher whose pupils were so few and far between that only the shortest of lessons at the longest of intervals were recited on her piano; on the second-floor-front was a wood-engraver who took to photography to pay his rent. On the second-floor-back was a dressmaker who could not collect her bills; while in the rear was a laundress who washed for the tenants. Lastly, there was Mrs. Martha Munger, Stephen Carlin's sister, who occupied the third floor both front and back, over the laundress's quarters, the one chimney serving them both.

While the evil eye of the skylight, despite its dishonorable calling, might have been put to some good use during the day, it can be safely said that it was of no earthly, and for that matter of no heavenly, use during the night. Nor did anything else in the way of illumination take its place. My Lady Dowager's patrons were too poor or too stingy to furnish even a single burner up and down the three flights. The excuse was that the rays of the arc-light, blazing away on the

opposite side of the street, were not only powerful enough to shine through the weather-beaten hall door covering the entrance but, still further, to illuminate the rickety staircase—the very staircase up which Stephen Carlin was now groping in answer to Martha's letter.

She had heard his heavy tread on the creaky steps, and was watching for him with the door ajar—an inch at first, and then wide open, her kerosene lamp held over the railing to give him light.

"Oh, but I'm glad you've come, Stephen. I was getting worried. I was afraid maybe you didn't get the letter. It's black dark outside, isn't it?" and she glanced at the cheap clock on the mantel behind her. "Come in, the kettle was boiling over when I heard you. I'll talk to you in a minute."

He followed with only a pressure of her hand, and, without a word of greeting, seated himself near a table. In the same quiet, silent way he watched her as she busied herself about the apartment, lifting the kettle from the stove, adjusting the wick of the lamp which had begun to smoke from the draft of the open door, taking from a shelf two cups and saucers and from a tin bread box a loaf and some crackers.

When, in one of her journeys to and fro, she passed where the light of the lamp fell full upon her round face, framed in its white cap and long strings, he gave a slight start. There were dark circles below her eyes and heavy lines near the corners of her mouth—signs he had not seen since the month she had spent in the

Marine Hospital when the plague was stamped out. He noticed, too, that her robust figure, with its broad shoulders and capacious bosom, restful pillow to many a new-born baby, seemed shrunken—not in weight, but in its spring, as if all her alertness (she was under fifty) had oozed out. It was only when she had completed her labors and taken a chair beside him, her soft, nursing hand covering his own, that his mind reverted to the tragedy which had brought him to her side. Even then, although she sat with her face turned toward his, her eyes reading his own, some moments passed before either of them spoke. At last, in a wondering, dazed way, she exclaimed: "Have you, in all your life, Stephen, ever heard anything like it?"

Carlin shook his head. The letter had given him the facts, and no additional details could alter the situation. It was as if a dead body were lying in the next room awaiting interment; when the time came he would step in and look at it, ask the hour of burial, and step out again.

"I came as soon as I'd read your letter," he said slowly examining one by one his rough fingers bunched together in his lap. "We got chuck-a-block on Second Avenue or I'd have been here before. Why didn't you let me know sooner?" As he spoke he shifted his gaze to the wrinkles in her throat—a new anxiety rising as he noticed how many more had gathered since he saw her last.

"She wouldn't have it, and I want to tell you that

you've got to be careful, as it is. And mind you don't speak too sudden to her."

In answer he craned his head as if to see around the jamb of the door leading into the smaller room and, lowering his voice, whispered: "Is she here now?"

"No, but she will be in a few minutes; she's often late, she waits until it's dark."

"How long has she been here with you?"

"About two weeks."

"Two weeks! You didn't tell me that."

"She wouldn't let me. She is having trouble enough and I have to do pretty much as she wants."

He ruminated for a moment, this time scrutinizing the palms of his hands, seemingly interested in some callous spots near the thumb-joint, and then asked: "How did she find you?"

"By God's mercy and nothing else. I was sitting in a Third Avenue car and there she was opposite. I couldn't believe my eyes, she was that changed! She would have been off the dock, I believe, if she hadn't found me. She has run away from Dalton now, and is so scared of him she trembles every time some one comes up the stairs. That's why I wrote you not to ring. He has nothing left. He kept a-hounding her to write to her father and nigh drove her crazy; so she left him."

"Does she know Mr. Felix is here?" He had finished with the callous spots and was cracking every horny knuckle in his fingers as he spoke, as if their loosening might help solve the problem that vexed him.

"No, I haven't dared tell her. She would be off the dock for sure then. She is more afraid of him than she is of Dalton."

"Mr. Felix won't hurt her," he rejoined sharply.

"Yes, but she knows she'd hurt *him* if he finds out how bad she's off. She'd rather he'd think she's living like she used to do. Oh, Stephen—Stephen, but it's a bad, bad business! I'm beat out wondering what ought to be done."

She pushed back her chair, and began walking up and down the room like one whose suffering can find no other relief, pausing now and then to speak to him as she passed. "I tried to get her to listen. I told her Mr. Felix might be coming over from London. I had to put it to her that way, but she nearly went out of her mind, stiffened up, and began to put on such a wild look that I had to stop. Have you heard from him lately?"

"No, I wrote and wrote and could get no answer. Then I went up to where he boarded, and the woman told me he'd been gone some months—she didn't know where. He left no word, and she forgot to get the name of the express that came for his trunk. He is down with sickness somewheres, or he'd have showed up. He was not himself at all when I last saw him—that's long before you got back from Canada. He's done nothing but walk the streets since he come ashore."

Stephen stopped, as if it were too painful for him to continue, looked around the room, noting its bare-

ness, and asked, with a break in his voice: "Where do you put her?"

"In the little room. She wouldn't take mine and she won't let me help her. She got work at first on 14th Street, in that big store near the Square, and worked there for a while, that was when she was with Dalton. But Dalton drove her out. And when she was near dead, with nothing to eat, some people picked her up and she stayed with them all night—she never told me where. That was last spring. She stood it for some months living from hand to mouth, she working her fingers to the bone for him, until she was afraid of her life and left him again. She was going she didn't know where when I looked at her 'cross the car and she saw me.

"'Martha!' she cried, and was on the seat next me, my two arms about her. She was sobbing like a lost child who has found its mother again. There were two other women in the car, and they wanted to help, but I told them it was only my baby back again. We were near 10th Street at the time and I got her out and brought her here and put her to bed— Listen! Keep still a moment! That's her step! Yes, thank God, she's alone! I'm always scared lest he should come with her. Get in there behind the curtain!"

Martha had lifted the lamp again as she spoke, and was holding it over the banister, one hand downstretched toward a woman whose small white fingers were clutching the mahogany rail, pulling herself up one step at a time.

"Don't hurry, my child. It's a hard climb, I know. Give me the box. I began to get worried. Are you tired?"

"A little. It has been a long day." She sighed as she passed into the room, the nurse following with a large pasteboard box.

"It's good to get back to you," she continued, sinking into a chair near the mantel and unfastening her cloak. "The stairs seem to grow steeper every time I come up. Thank you. Just hang it behind the door. And now my hat, please." She lifted the cheap black straw from her head, freeing a fluff of light-golden hair, and with her fingers combed it back from her forehead.

"And please bring me my slippers. I have walked all the way home, and my poor feet ache."

The nurse stooped for the hat, patted the thin shoulders, and went into the adjacent room for the slippers, whispering to Carlin on her way back to keep hidden until she called. He was still standing concealed by the folds of the calico curtain dividing the apartment, a choke in his throat as he watched the frail woman, her sharpened knees outlined under the folds of the black dress and, below it, the edge of a white petticoat bespattered with mud, the whole figure drooping as if there were not strength enough along its length to hold the body upright. What shocked him even more were the deep-sunken eyes and the hollows in the cheeks and about the brows. All the laugh and sparkle of the once joyous, beautiful

girl he had known were gone. Only the gentle voice was left.

Martha was now back, kneeling on the floor, untying the shabby shoes, rubbing the small, delicately shaped feet in her plump hands to rest and warm them. "There, my lamb, that's better," he heard her say, as she drew on the heelless slippers. "I'll have tea in a minute. The kettle's been boiling this hour." Then, as though it were an afterthought: "Stephen wants to see you, so I told him maybe you would let him. Shall I tell him to come?"

"Your brother, you mean? The one who lives here in New York?" she asked listlessly.

"Yes, he's never forgotten you. And——"

"Some day I will see him, Martha. I shall be better soon, and then——"

She stopped and stared at Carlin, who misunderstanding Martha's words, had drawn aside the calico curtain and was advancing toward her, bowing as he walked, the choke still in his throat. "I hope your ladyship is not offended," he ventured. "It was all one family once, if I may say so, and there is only Martha and me."

She had straightened as she saw him coming and then, remembering that she was in Martha's room, and he Martha's brother, she held out her hand. "No, Stephen, I am very glad. I was only a little startled. It is a long time since I saw you, but I remember you quite well, and you have not changed. A little grayer perhaps. When was it?"

"When I came back from Calcutta, your ladyship, and the *Rover* was wrecked. Your father ordered the crew home. I was first mate, your ladyship remembers, and had to look after them. Some six years agone, I take it."

"Yes, it all comes back to me now," she answered dreamily "six years—is it not more than that?"

"No, your ladyship. Just about six."

She paused, rested her head on her hand, and looked at him intently from beneath the wave of hair that had dropped again about her brow, and asked: "Why do you still call me 'your ladyship' Stephen?"

"Well, I don't know, your ladyship. Mebbe it's because I've always been used to it. But I won't if your ladyship doesn't want me to."

"Never mind, it does not matter. It has been so long since I have heard it that it sounded odd, that was all." She roused herself with an effort and added, in a brighter tone, changing the topic: "It was very good of you to come to see Martha. She has me to look after now, and I am afraid she gets unhappy at times. You cannot think how good she is to me—so good—so good! I often wake in the night dreaming I am a child again and stretch out my hand to her, just as I used to do years ago when she slept beside me. She often speaks of you. I am glad you came to-day."

Carlin had been standing over her all the time, his rough pea-jacket buttoned across his broad chest, his ruddy sailor's face with its fringe of gray whiskers, bushy eyebrows, and clear, steady gaze in vivid contrast to her own shrinking weakness.

"It ain't altogether Martha," he exclaimed in tones suddenly grown deliberate. "It's you, your ladyship, that I particular came to see. You ain't fit to take care of yourself, and there ain't nobody but me and Martha that I can lay hands on now to help—nobody but just us two. I'm not here to judge nobody. I know what's happened and what you're going through, and you've got to let me lend a hand. If I lived to be a hundred I could never forget his lordship's kindness to me, and things can't go on as they are with you. There is a way out of it if you only knew it."

She threw back her head quickly. "Not my Father?"

"No, not your father. Although his lordship would haul down his colors mighty quick if once he saw you as I do now. But there are others who would be glad to take a hand at the wheel and help you steer out of all this misery. You ain't accustomed to it and you don't deserve it, and I'm going to put a stop to it if I can." This last came with still greater emphasis—the first mate was speaking now.

"Thank you, Stephen. You and Martha are very much alike. She has the loyalty of an old servant, and you have the loyalty of an old friend. But we must all pay for our mistakes—" she halted, drew in her breath, and added, picking at her dress, "—and our sins. Everybody condemns us but God. He is the only one who forgets, when we are sorry."

"Not so many remember as you may think, your

ladyship. Some of 'em have forgotten—forgotten everything—and are standing by ready to catch a line or man a boat."

"Yes, there are always kind people in the world."

"Well, there mayn't be such an awful lot of 'em as you think, but I know one. There's Mr. Felix, for instance, who——"

She sprang to her feet, her hands held out as a barrier, and stood trembling, staring wildly at him, all the blood gone from her cheeks. "Stop, Stephen! Not another word. You must not mention that name to me. I cannot and will not permit it. I have listened too long already. I am very grateful for your kindness and for your offers to me, but you must not touch on my private affairs. I am earning my own living, and I shall continue to do so. And now I would like to be alone."

"But, your ladyship, I've got something to tell you which——"

Martha stepped between them. "I think, Stephen, you'd better not talk to her ladyship any more. You might come some other night when she's more rested. You see she's had a very bad day and——"

Stephen's voice rang out clear. "Not say anything more, when——"

Martha dug her fingers into his arm. "Hush!" she whispered hoarsely, her lips close against his hairy cheek. "She'll be on the floor in a dead faint in a minute. Didn't I tell you not to mention his name?"

She stepped quickly to the side of her charge, who

had walked falteringly toward the window and now stood peering into the darkness through the panes of the dormer.

"It's only Stephen's way, child, and you mustn't mind him. He doesn't mean anything. He hasn't seen much of women, living aboard ship half his life. It's only his way of trying to be kind. And you see he's known you from a baby, same as me—and that's why he lets out."

She had folded the pitiful figure in her arms, her hand patting the bent shoulders. "But we'll get on together, my lamb—you and me. And we'll have supper right away— And I must ask you, Stephen, to go, now, because her ladyship is worn out and I'm going to put her to bed."

Carlin picked up his hat and stood fingering the rim, trying to make up his mind whether he should force the truth upon her then or obey orders and wait. The training of long years told.

"Well, just as you say, your ladyship, I won't stay if you don't want me, but don't forget I'm within call, not more than a half-hour away. All Martha's got to do is to send a postal card and I'm here. I'm sorry I hurt your feelings. God knows I didn't mean to! Martha knows what I wanted to tell you. You'll have to come to it sooner or later. Good night. I hope your ladyship will be rested in the morning. Good night, Martha. You know you can write when you want me. Good night again, your ladyship."

He opened the door softly, closed it behind him

without a sound, placed his hat on his head, and, reaching out for the hand-rail, felt his way in the dark down the rickety stairs and out onto the sidewalk.

Once there, he looked up and down the street as if undecided, turned sharply, and bent his steps toward Second Avenue, muttering to himself over and over again as he walked: "I got to find Mr. Felix. I got to find Mr. Felix."

CHAPTER XIV

Felix O'Day's runaway wife, despite the many quiet hours spent in Martha's room, near St. Mark's Place, had not told her old nurse all her story. She had wept her heart out on the dear woman's shoulder and had cuddled close in her arms, giving her scraps and bits of her unfortunate history, with side-lights here and there on a misery so abject and so terrifying that the dear nurse had hugged the frail figure all the tighter, seeing only the wound and knowing nothing of the steps that had led up to the final blow or the anger that hastened it.

Martha had known, of course, that there had been bankruptcy and ruin; that Oakdale, the ancestral estate of the O'Days—theirs for two centuries, with all its priceless old furniture, tapestries, pictures, and porcelains—had, after the owner's death, been sold at public auction; that Fernlodge, Mr. Felix's own home, had gone in the same way; that Lady Barbara, for some reason, had returned to her father, Lord Carnavon; that the girl baby had died; and that "Mr. Felix," as she always called him, had gone to London where he had taken up his abode at his club. Lady Barbara herself had given these details in a letter written a couple of weeks after the death of the child, Martha being in Toronto at the time.

Martha had also learned, through a letter from the head gardener's wife, that after a few months' stay, Lady Barbara had left her father's house because of a fierce scene with Lord Carnavon, who had sent for his carriage, conducted her into it, and given directions to his coachman either to set his daughter down on the main road, outside his gates, or to take her to the nearest public house.

She had learned, too, that her former charge, after having eloped with Dalton, had dropped entirely out of sight and, so far as her own knowledge was concerned, had never come to light again until, with a cry of joy, Lady Barbara sank sobbing on her shoulder in that Third Avenue car.

Much of this information had been gathered from newspaper clippings that her old uncle, living in London, had mailed to her. More particulars had come in a letter from James Muldoon, one of the grooms at Oakdale, who gave a most pitiful and graphic account of the way the London dealers crowded about the old porcelains in the ebony cabinets, and of the prices paid by the Earl of Brinsmore, who bought most of the pictures, half of the old Spanish furniture, as well as the largest but one of the great tapestries, to enrich the new mansion he was then building in London and in which James Muldoon was happy to say he had been promised a place.

In still other letters, open references had also been made to a much discussed speculation, entangling many of those whom Martha had formerly known,

followed by a grand financial explosion in which some of the same people had been badly injured. In connection with these disasters mention was likewise made of a certain Mr. Dalton, who had disappeared shortly after, leaving rather a bad name behind him, altogether undeserved, according to many of the papers, he always having been a "financier of the highest standing." This last ball of gossip was rolled Martha's way by her nephew, who was a clerk in a solicitor's office off the Strand and who had mailed an editorial on the matter to his uncle, who promptly forwarded it to Martha. She had read it carefully to the end and had put it in her drawer without at first grasping the full meaning of the fact that, but for the activities of this same Mr. Dalton, her dear mistress and her dear mistress's husband, Felix O'day, and her dear mistress's father-in-law, the late Sir Carroll O'Day, would still be in possession of their ancestral estates and in undisturbed enjoyment of whatever happiness they, individually and collectively, could get out of life.

What the dear woman never knew, and it was just as well that she did not, were the special happenings which ended in the overwhelming catastrophe.

It really began with a tea basket, holding enough for two, which was opened one lovely afternoon under the big willows skirting that little strip of land bordering the backwater at Cookham-on-Thames. My lady at the time was wearing a wide leghorn hat with blue ribbons that matched her eyes and set off the roses in her fair English cheeks. Her companion was in white

flannels--a muscular, well-set-up young man of thirty, fifteen years younger than her husband and with twice his charm—one of those delightful companions who possess the rare quality of making an hour seem but five minutes. A gay party had dropped down the river in her father's launch, which had been tied up at Ferry Inn, and Dalton had insisted on taking my lady for just a half-hour's poling in a punt, Felix and the others preferring to take their tea at the Inn—plans readily agreed to and carried out, except that the half-hour prolonged itself into two whole ones.

Then there had come a week-end at Glenmore Castle and a garden party outside London, and then five-o'clock teas at half a dozen private houses, including one or two meetings a trifle more secluded. And all quite as it should be, for a most desirable and valuable guest was this same Mr. Guy Dalton, a man received everywhere with open arms, as "one of the rising men of the time, my dear sir," a financier of distinction, indeed, and a promoter of such skill that he had only to issue a prospectus, or wink knowingly on the street, or take you aside at the club and whisper confidentially to you, when everything he had issued, winked at, or whispered about would go up with a rush, and countless men and women—a goodly number were women—would be hundreds, nay, thousands of pounds the richer before the week was out.

That his own buoyant imagination, as well as that of those who followed his lead, should have been stretched to the utmost was quite within the possibili-

ties when one recollects that the basis of all this wealth was crude rubber, a substance of pronounced elasticity. This, too, accounts for the vim and suddenness of the final recoil attending the final collapse—a recoil which smashed everything and everybody within its reach.

There were "words," of course, between Dalton and some of his victims. There always are "words" when the ball bounces back and you catch it full in the eye. And for salves and soothing plasters there were the customary explanations regarding the state of the market, the tightness of money, the non-arrival of important details, the delaying of despatches owing to a break in the cable, together with offers of heavy discounts, and increased allotments of stock for renewed subscriptions. But the end came, just as it always does.

And so did the aftermath, as was shown by the advertisements in the auction columns of the daily papers and the motley mob of hungry, perspiring dealers, pawing over the household gods; and, more disastrous still, because of its rarity, Felix's brave fight to save his father's name, the whole struggle ending in his own ruin.

As for the very pretty young woman who had been wearing the hat with blue ribbons, it may be as well to remark that when the milk in the heart of a woman has become slightly curdled, it is to be expected that, under certain exciting influences, the whole will turn sour. When to this curdling process is added the loss of her child and her fortune, calamities made all the more insupportable by reason of an interview

lasting an hour in which her two hot hands were held in those of a sympathetic man of thirty, her cheeks within an inch of his lips, the quickest—in fact, the only way—yes, really the only way, to prevent any further calamity is to put your best gown in your best dressing-case, catch up your jewels, and exchange your husband's roof for that of your father's. And this is precisely what my lady did do, and there in her father's house she stayed, despite the entreaties of her own and her father's friends.

"And why not?" she had argued, with flashing eyes: "I am without a shilling of my own, owing to the Quixotic ideas of my husband, who, without thinking of me, has beggared himself to pay his father's debts. And that, too, just when I need to be comforted most. He does not care how I suffer; and now that my father has offered me a home, I will lead my own life, surrounded by the few friends who have loved me for myself alone."

That the eminent financier—it might be better perhaps to say the *late* eminent financier—was one of those same unselfish beings who had "loved her for herself alone," and that he had, at once and without the delay of an hour, flown to her side followed as a matter of course, as did the gossip, men and women in and about the clubs and drawing-rooms nodding meaningly or hinting behind their hands.

"Rather rough on O'Day," the men had agreed. "That comes of marrying a woman young enough to be your daughter." "She ought to have known better,"

was the verdict of the women. "So many other ways of getting what you want without making a scandal," this from a duchess from behind her fan to a divorcée. But few words of sympathy for the deserted husband escaped any of them and, except from his old servants, Felix allowed himself to receive none.

He had made no move to win her back. To him she was, at the worst, only the same wilful and spoiled child she had always been, while he was over twenty years her senior. What he hoped for was that her common sense, her breeding, and her pride would come to the rescue, and that after her pique had spent itself, she would become once more the loving wife.

And it is quite possible that this hope might have been realized had it not been for one of those unfortunate and greatly to be regretted concurrences which so often precede if they do not precipitate many of life's catastrophes.

One of Lord Carnavon's grooms was the unfortunate match that caused this explosion. He had been sent down to Dorsetshire for a horse and, in an out-of-the-way inn in one corner of the county, had stumbled —early the next morning—into a cosey little sitting-room. When he came to his senses—he never recovered the whole of them until he was safe once more inside his lordship's stables—he told, with bulging eyes and bated breath, what he had seen. Whereupon the head coachman forthwith informed his wife, who at once poured it into the ears of the housekeeper, who, being jealous of my lady, fearing her dominance, lost

no time in amplifying the details to Lord Carnavon. That gentleman had walked his library the rest of the night and, on my lady's return from Scotland, two mornings later (she had "spent the night with her aunt"), had denounced her in tones so shrill that every word was heard at the end of the long gallery; the tirade, to his lordship's amazement, being cut short by his daughter's defiant answer: "And why not, if I love him?"

All of which accounts for the infamous order roared five minutes later by the distinguished nobleman to his coachman, who, having known her ladyship from a child and loved her accordingly, had not set her down on the main road, but had taken her to a cottage on an adjoining estate—her second change of roofs—from whence Dalton carried her off next day to Ostend, a refuge she had herself selected, the season there being then at its height.

Had either of them kept a diary, it is safe to say that the delirious hours which filled that first week at Ostend would have been checked off in gold letters. Neither of them had ever been so blissfully happy, nor so passionately enamoured of the other, nor so overjoyed that the dreary past, with all its misunderstandings, calumnies, and injustice, had been wiped out forever.

There had, of course, been a few colorless moments. On a certain Saturday, for instance, the eminent ex-financier, having lost his head after the manner of some born gamblers, had, at the Casino, played the

wrong number—a series of wrong numbers, in fact—an error which resulted in his pushing a crisp bundle of Bank of England notes—almost all he had with him—toward the spidery hands of a suave gentleman with rat eyes and bloodless face, who gathered them up with a furtive, deadly smile.

The gold letters might have been omitted here, and, in their stead, my lady could have made a common pinhole to remind her, if she ever cared to remember, that it was on that very night that her passionately enamoured lover had helped her unfasten from her throat a string of pearls which O'Day had given her, and which, strange to say, for a woman so injured, so maligned, and so misunderstood, she, with Dalton's advice, had carried off when she deserted both her husband and her husband's bed and board. And she might have inserted just below the pinhole the illuminating note that, after unfastening the string, Dalton had forgotten to return it.

And then there had come an August morning—the following Monday, to be exact—when, his coffee untasted, he had sat staring at a paragraph in the financial column of a London paper, not daring to lay it down for fear she would pick it up. It gave a full and detailed account of the discovery of a series of certificates bearing duplicate numbers, said duplicates claiming to be the genuine shares of the Bawhadder Rubber Co., Ltd. It also hinted at a searching investigation about to be made by a financial committee of the highest standing at its next regular meeting, but a few days off.

More important still was a crisp editorial, charging the directors of the aforesaid company, and particularly its promoter—name withheld—with irregularities of the gravest import.

And it was on this same Monday morning—another pinhole, made with a big black pin would serve best here—before the stone-cold coffee and the dry, uneaten toast had been sent away, that there had arrived a most important telegram (that is, Dalton had *said* it had arrived) ordering him back to London on business of the *utmost importance*. So urgent were the summons that he was forced to leave at once—so he explained to the manager of the hotel—and as madame wished to avoid the night journey by way of Ostend —the channel being almost always rough, even in summer, and she easily disturbed—he had decided to take the shorter and more comfortable route, and would the urbane and obliging gentleman please secure two tickets to London by way of Calais and Dover? This would give them a day in Paris at the house of a friend, and the next morning would see them safely landed in London, in ample time for the business in question.

The pins can be dispensed with now; so can the pencil and so can any special entries. Henceforth life for these two exiles was to be one long toboggan slide, with every post they passed marking a lower level. The sled with its occupants made no stop at Paris nor did it go by way of Calais nor did it reach Dover. It swooped on down to Havre, the steamer sailing an

hour after the train arrived, crossed the ocean at full speed, and dumped its two passengers one hot August night in front of a cheap and inconspicuous hotel on the East Side, New York, where Mr. and Mrs. Stanton, from Toronto, Canada, would be at home, should anybody call—which, it is quite safe to say, nobody ever did.

No, nothing of all this did the heart-broken woman tell the tender old nurse, who had carried her in her arms many a night, and who was now willing to sacrifice everything she possessed to give her mistress one hour of peace.

Nor did she tell of the shock which she, a woman of quality, had received when she entered the two cheaply furnished rooms, her only shelter for months, and which, to a woman accustomed from babyhood to a luxurious home and the care of attentive and loyal servants, had affected her more keenly than anything that had yet happened.

Neither did she confide into the willing ears of the sympathetic woman the details of her gradual awakening from Dalton's spell as his irritability, cowardice, and selfishness became more and more apparent. Nor yet of her growing anxiety as their resources declined; an anxiety which had so weighed upon her mind that she could neither sleep nor rest, despite his continued promises of daily remittances that never came and his rose-colored schemes for raising money which never materialized.

Neither did she uncover the secret places of her

own heart, and tell the old nurse of the fight she had made in those earlier days when she had faced the situation without flinching; nor of her stubborn determination to still fight on to the end. She had even at one time sought to defend him against herself. All men had their weaknesses, she had reasoned; Guy had his. Moreover, the crash had been none of his doing. He had been deceived by false reports instigated by his enemies, including her own father-in-law and—yes, her husband as well, who could have avoided the catastrophe had he followed Guy's advice, and persuaded Sir Carroll O'Day to hold on to his shares. How, then, could she desert him, poor as he was and with the world against him? She had been untrue to everything else. Could she not redeem herself by being at least true to her sin?

What she did tell Martha, and there was the old ring in her voice as she spoke, was of her refusal to yield to Dalton's presistent entreaties to write to her father for sufficient money to start him in a new enterprise which, with "even his limited means"—thus ran the letter she was to copy and sign—"was already exceeding his most sanguine expectations, and which, with a few thousand pounds of additional capital, would yield enormous returns." And she might have added that so emphatic had been her refusal that, for the first time in all their intercourse, Dalton's eyes had been opened to something he had never realized in her before, the quality of the blood that runs in some Englishwomen's veins—this time

the blood of the Carnavons, who for two centuries had been noted for their indomitable will.

Her defiance had seemed all the more remarkable to him because as he well knew their combined resources were dwindling. She had, in fact, only a few finger-rings left, together with some cheap trinkets; among them a pair of sleeve-buttons then in her cuffs, a pair which she had given Felix and which she found in her jewel-box the day after she left him, and which she had determined to return until she realized how small was their value.

The rest of her sad story came by fits and starts.

With her head on Martha's shoulder she told of the horror of that rainy April night when, with agonized hands against her hot cheeks, she had heard him stumbling up the narrow stairs staggering drunk, lunging through the door, and falling headlong at her feet. Of the deadly fear born in her, for the first time in her life, she, helpless and alone, without a human being to whom she could appeal, not daring to disclose her own identity lest graver results might follow; he, prostrate before her, naked to his inmost bone, with all his perfidy exposed. Of his cursing her conscientious scruples and family pride, her milk-and-water principles, demanding again that she should write her father and that very night, ending his entreaties with a blow of his flat hand on her cheek which sent her reeling toward her narrow bed.

She had watched her chance, caught up her hat and cloak, and had slipped down-stairs, avoiding the crowd

about the side-door, and had then fled as if for her life, to be found an hour later by an expressman's wife, who had put her to bed with a kindness and tenderness she had not known since she left her husband's roof.

Then there had followed a long, weary day's search for work, ending at last in defeat when, disheartened and footsore, she had dragged herself once more up the hotel stairs, with another tightening of her resolution to fight it out to the end.

Greatly to her surprise, Dalton had received her with marked politeness. He had begged her forgiveness, pleading that his nerves had been upset by his financial troubles. With his arm around her, he had told her how young and pretty she still was, and how sad it made him when he thought he had ruined her life and brought her all these weary miles from home, his contrition being apparently so genuine, that she had determined to trust him once more, and would have told him so had she not gone into her room to change her dress, only to find that he had pawned the few remaining trinkets and articles of wearing-apparel she possessed, in order to try his luck in a neighboring pool-room.

She had realized, then, where she stood. There was but one thing for her to do and that was to hunt again for work. She had been an expert needlewoman in her better days and this knowledge might earn her their board.

With this in her mind, she had consulted a woman, living on the floor above, who had often spoken to her

when they passed each other on the stairs, and who was employed in a department store on 14th Street near Broadway, the result being that Stiger & Company had given "Mrs. Stanton" a place in the repair shop, her wages being equal to her own and Dalton's board. This had continued all through the summer, her earnings keeping the roof over their heads, Dalton leaving her for days at a time, his invariable excuse for his absence being that he was "trying to get employment."

Finally—and again her eyes burned, and the color mounted to her hot cheeks as she reached this part of her story—there had come that last awful, unforgettable December night.

She had come home from work and had put on a thin silk wrapper, too well worn for pawning, when the door of their little sitting-room was opened and Dalton entered, bringing two men with him. One of them kept his hat on as he talked, the other slouched his from his head after he had taken a seat and had had a chance to look her over. The three had come upon her suddenly, and she, realizing her dishabille, had risen hastily, excusing herself, when Dalton, who was half tipsy, stepped between her and her bedroom door.

"No, you'll stay here," he had cried; "you're prettier as you are. I never saw you so fetching. Don't mind them, they're friends of mine. We've ordered up something to drink."

She had stood trembling, looking from one to the other, her heart hammering wildly. No man had ever

addressed her with such insolence and before such company. What she feared was that something would snap in her and she fall fainting to the floor.

"I will change my dress," she had answered firmly, speaking slowly to hide her terror. She was Lord Carnavon's daughter now.

"No, I tell you, Barbara—I——"

There was something in her eyes that told him he had reached the limit of her forbearance. Beyond that there was danger.

She had glided past him, shut and locked her bedroom door, struggled with bungling fingers into her walking-dress, pinned on her hat, thrown an old silk waterproof around her shoulders, had slid back the bolt of her chamber opening into the hall, crept down the steps, and fled.

Ten minutes later Martha's arms were about her, and she sobbing on her old nurse's shoulder.

CHAPTER XV

The day following Stephen's visit was one of many spent by Lady Barbara in working at "home," as she called the simple apartment in which Martha had given her shelter.

With the aid of a shop-girl whose mother Martha had known, she had found employment at Rosenthal's, on upper Third Avenue. There had been need of an expert needlewoman in a department recently opened, and Mangan, in charge of the work, had taken her name and address. The repairing of rare laces had been one of her triumphs when a girl, she having placed an inset in the middle of an old piece of Valenciennes which had deceived even the experts at Kensington Museum. And so, when one of Rosenthal's agents had looked up her lodgings, had seen Martha, and noted "Mrs. Stanton's" quiet refinement, he had at once given her the place. She had retained, with Martha's advice, the name that Dalton had assumed for her on her arrival in New York, and Rosenthal's pay-roll and messengers knew her by no other.

These days at home had been gradually extended, her employer finding that she could work there more satisfactorily, and of late the greater part of each week had been spent in the small suite of rooms in St. Mark's Place—much to Martha's delight, who had arranged

her own duties so as to be with her mistress. The good woman had long since given up night-nursing, and the few patrons dependent upon her during the day had had to be content with an "exchange," which she generally managed to obtain, there being one or two of the fraternity on whom she could call.

And these days, in spite of the sorrow hovering over her charge, Martha never found wholly unhappy. They constantly reminded her of the good times at Oakdale when she used to bring in her young mistress's breakfast. She could recall the dainty, white egg-shell china, the squat silver service bearing the Carnavon arms, and the film of lace which she used to throw around her ladyship's shoulders, lifting her hair to give it room. The butler would bring the tray to the door, and Martha would carry it herself to the bedside, where she would be met with the cry, "Must I get up?" or the more soothing greeting of, "Oh, you good Martha —well, give me my wrapper!"

The delicate porcelain and heirloom silver were missing now, and so was the filmy lace, but the tired mistress, could sleep as long as she pleased, thank Heaven! and the same loving care be given her. And the meal could be as nicely served, even though the thick cup cost but a penny and the tea was poured from an earthen pot kept hot on the stove.

Martha's deft hands relieved her mistress, too, of many other little necessary duties, such as the repair of her clothes; having them carefully laid out for the morning so that the nap might be prolonged and time

be given for the care of the beautiful hair and frail hands; helping her dress; serving her breakfast, and getting her ready for the day's work. These services over, Martha would move the small pine table close to the sill of the window, where the light was better, spread a clean white towel over its top, and sit beside her while she sewed.

This restful, almost happy, life had been rudely shaken, if not entirely wrecked, by Stephen's visit. Up to that time, Lady Barbara—who had been nearly three weeks with Martha—had not only delighted in her work, but had shown an enviable pride in keeping pace with her employer's engagements, often working rather late into the night to finish her allotment on time.

The particular work uppermost in her mind on the night Stephen had called was the repairing of a costly Spanish mantilla which had been picked up in Spain by one of Rosenthal's customers. Through the carelessness of a packer, it had been badly slashed near the centre—an ugly, ragged tear which only the most skilful of needles could restore. Mangan, some days before, had given it to her to repair with special instructions to return it at a given time, when he had agreed to deliver it to its owner. It was with a sudden gripping of her heart, therefore, that Martha on her return from an errand at noon had found the mantilla, promised for that very afternoon at three o'clock, lying neglected on the table, Lady Barbara sitting by the window with listless hands and drooping head. She

grew still more anxious when at the appointed hour Rosenthal's messenger rapped at the door and stood silently waiting, his presence voicing the purpose of his mission, and she heard her mistress say, without an attempt at explanation: "I am sorry, tell Mr. Mangan, but the Spanish mantilla is not finished. Some of the other pieces are ready, but you need not wait. I cannot stop now, even to do them up properly, but I will bring the mantilla myself to-morrow. Please say so to Mr. Mangan."

The extreme lassitude of her manner only added to Martha's anxiety and, as the afternoon wore on, she watched Lady Barbara's every move with ever-increasing alarm. Now and then her poor mistress would drop her needle, turn her face to the window, and look out into vacancy, her mouth quivering as if with some inward thought which she had neither the will nor the desire to voice aloud.

As the hours lengthened, this mental absorption and growing physical weariness were followed by a certain nervous tension, so pronounced that the nurse, accustomed to various forms of feminine breakdowns, had already determined what remedies to use should the symptoms increase.

That Stephen's visit was responsible for this condition, she now no longer doubted. What she had intended as a relief had only complicated the situation. And yet in going over all that had happened and all that was likely to happen, she became more than ever convinced that either his visit must be repeated,

or that she alone must make the announcement that had trembled on Stephen's lips. She had recognized, almost from the first, that despite the relief her mistress had enjoyed in the little apartment some strong, masculine hand and mind were needed to stem the tide of further disaster. Her own practical common sense also told her that their present way of living was far too precarious to be counted upon. Lady Barbara's position with Rosenthal was but temporary. At any moment it might be lost, and then would follow another dreary hunt for work, with all its rebuffs, and sooner or later the delicately nurtured woman would succumb and go under in a mental or physical collapse, the hospital her only alternative.

None of these forebodings, it must be said, had filled Lady Barbara's mind. As long as she continued under Martha's care she could rest in peace, free from the dread of the drunken step on the stair or the rude bursting in of her chamber door. Free, too, from other deadly terrors which had pursued her, and of which she could not even think without a shudder, for try as she could she never forgot Dalton's willingness to turn their home into a gamblers' resort.

That he would force her to return to him for any other purpose she did not believe. He had no legal hold upon her—such as an Englishman has upon his wife—and, as he had pawned everything of value she possessed and most of her clothes, she could be of no further use to him, except by applying to her father or to her friends for pecuniary relief. This, as she

had told him, she would rather die than do, and from the oaths he had muttered at the time she was convinced he believed her.

All she wanted now was to earn her bread, help Martha with her rent, and, when the day's work was over, creep into her arms and rest.

And yet, while it was true that Stephen's visit had been responsible for her nervous breakdown, it was not for the reason that Martha supposed. His reference to her private affairs had of course offended her, and justly so, but there was something else which hurt her far more—a something in the old ship-chandler's manner when he spoke to her which forced to the front a question ever present in her mind, whatever her task and however tender the ministrations of the old nurse; one that during all her sojourn under this kindly roof had haunted her, like a nightmare.

And it was this. What did the look mean that she sometimes surprised in Martha's eyes—the same look she had detected in Stephen's? Were they looks of pity or were they—and she shuddered—looks of scorn? This was the nightmare which had haunted her, the problem she could not fathom.

And because she could not fathom it, she had passed a wakeful night, and this long, unhappy day. This mystery must end, and that very night.

When the shadows fell and the evening meal was ready, she put away her work, smoothed her hair and took her seat beside the nurse, eating little and answering Martha's anxious, but carefully worded

questions in monosyllables. With the end of the meal, she pushed back her chair and sought her bedroom, saying that, if Martha did not mind, she would throw herself on her bed and rest awhile.

She lay there listening until the last clink of the plates and cups and the moving of the table told her that the evening's work was done and the things put away; then she called:

"Martha, won't you come and sit beside me, so that you can brush out my hair? I want to talk to you. You need not bring the lamp, I have light enough."

Martha hurried in and settled herself beside the narrow bed. Lady Barbara lifted her head so that the tresses were free for Martha's hands, and sinking back on the pillow said almost in a whisper: "I have been thinking of your brother, and want your help. What did he mean when he said that things could not go on as they were with me? And that he was going to put a stop to them if he could?"

Martha caught herself just in time. She was not ready yet to divulge her plans for her mistress's relief, and the question had taken her unawares. "He never forgets, my lady, what he owes your people," she answered at last. "And when he saw you, he was so sorry for you he was all shrivelled up."

She had the mass of blonde hair in her fingers now, the comb in hand prepared to straighten out the tangle.

For a moment Lady Barbara lay still, then turning her cheek, her eyes fixed on Martha's, she said in firmer

tones: "You are to tell me the truth, you know; that is why I sent for you."

"I have told it, my lady."

"And you are keeping nothing back?"

"Nothing."

The thin hand crept out and grasped the nurse's wrist.

"Then you are sure your brother does not despise me, Martha?"

"*My lady!* How can you say such a thing!" exclaimed Martha, dropping the comb.

"Well, everybody else does—everybody I know—and a great many I never saw and who never saw me. And now about yourself—and you must tell me frankly—do you hate me, Martha?"

"Hate you, you poor lamb"—tears were now choking her—"you, whom I held in my arms?— Oh, don't talk that way to me—I can't stand it, my lady! Ever since you were a child, I——"

"Yes, Martha, that is one reason for my asking you. You did love me as a child—but do you love me as a woman? A child is forgiven because it knows no better; a woman *does* know. Tell me, straight from your heart; I want to know; it will not make any difference in the way I love you. You have been everything to me, father, mother—everything, Martha. Tell me, do you forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive, my lady," she answered, her voice clearing, her will asserting itself. "You have always been my lady and you always will be. Maybe

you'd better not talk any more—you are all tired out, and——"

"Oh, yes, I will talk and you must listen. Don't pick up my comb. Never mind about my hair now. I know very well that there is not a single human being at home who would not shut the door in my face. Some of them do not understand, and never will, and I should never try to explain my life to them. I have suffered for my mistakes and made myself an outcast, and nobody has any compassion for an outcast. That is why I sit and wonder about Stephen, and why I have sat all day and wondered about you, and whether I ought to run away, for I could not stay here if you felt about me as I know those people feel at home. I want you to love me, Martha. Oh! yes, you prove it. You do everything for me, but way down deep in your heart, how do you feel? Do you love me as you always did?—*love*, Martha, not just pity, or feeling sorry like Stephen, or blaming me like the others? Yes, yes, yes, I know it, but I have wanted you to tell me. I am so in the dark. There, there, don't cry! Just one thing more. What did your brother mean when he said there were others who would lift me out of my misery?"

Again the old servant, brushing away her tears, hesitated to reply. She had sent for Stephen to answer this very question, and her mistress had practically driven him from the room. How, then, was she to meet it?

"He meant Mr. Felix, and if you had only listened, my lady, he would have——"

"Yes, I knew he did—although he did not dare say it," she cried with sudden intensity, sinking deeper back in her pillow as if to protect herself even from Martha. "I did not listen, for I never want to hear his name again. He drove me to what I did. He let me leave his house without so much as a word of regret, and not one line did he write me the whole time I was at my father's. Two months, Martha! *Two—whole—months!*" The words seemed to clog in her throat. "All that time he hid himself in his club, abusing me to every man he met. Somebody told me so. What was I to do? He had turned over to his father every shilling he possessed and left me without a penny—or, worse still, dependent on my father, and you know what that means! And then, when I could stand it no longer and went home, he sailed for South Africa on a shooting expedition."

Martha listened patiently. The outburst was not what she had expected, but she knew the unburdening would help in the end. She slid one plump hand under the tired head, and with the other stroked back the mass of hair from the damp forehead—very gently, as she might have calmed some fevered patient.

"May I finish what Stephen tried to tell you, my lady?" she crooned, still stroking back the hair. "And may I first tell you that Mr. Felix never went to Africa?"

"Oh, but he did!" she cried out again. "I know the men he went with. He was disgusted with the

whole business—so he told one of his friends—and never wanted to see me or England again."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, I heard about it in Ostend when—" She did not finish the sentence.

The nurse's free hand now closed on Lady Barbara's thin fingers, with a quiet, compelling softness, as if preparing her for a shock.

"Mr. Felix—came here—to New York—my lady—and is here now—or was some weeks ago—doing nothing but walk the streets." The words had come one by one, Martha's clasp tightening as she spoke.

The wasted figure lifted itself from the pillow and sat bolt upright.

"*Martha!* What do you mean!"

"Yes, right here in New York, my lady."

"It isn't so! Her hands were now clutching Martha's shoulders. "Tell me it isn't so! It can't be so!"

"It's the blessed God's truth, every word of it! He and Stephen have been looking for you day and night."

"Looking for me? Me! Oh, the shame of it, the shame!" Then with sudden fright: "But he must not find me! He shall not find me! You won't let him find me, will you, Martha?" Her arms were now tight about the old woman's neck, her agonized face turning wildly toward the door, as if she thought that Felix were already there. "You don't think he wants to kill me, do you?" she whispered at last, her face hidden in the nurse's neck.

"Tell me it isn't so! It can't be so!"

Martha folded her own strong arms about the shaking woman, warming and comforting her, as she had warmed and comforted the child. She would go through with it now to the end.

"No, it's not you he wants to kill," she said firmly, when the trembling figure was still.

Lady Barbara loosened her grasp and stared at her companion. "Then what does he want to see me for?" she asked, in a dazed, distracted tone.

"He wants to help you. He never forgets that you were his wife. He'll have his arms around you the moment he gets his eyes on you, and all your troubles will be over."

"But I do not want his help and I won't accept his help," she exclaimed, drawing herself up. "And I won't see him if he comes! You must not let me see him! Promise me you won't! And he must not find"—she hesitated as if unwilling to pronounce the name—"he must not find Mr. Dalton. There has been scandal enough. You do not think he wants to find Mr. Dalton, too, do you, Martha?" she added slowly, as if some new terror were growing on her.

"That's what Stephen thinks—find him and kill him. That's why he wanted you to listen last night. That's why he wants to get you and Mr. Felix together. Mr. Dalton won't stay here if he knows Mr. Felix is looking for him. He's too big a coward."

Lady Barbara shivered, drew her gown closer, and sank to the bed again, gazing straight before her. "Yes, that is what will happen, Martha—he would kill

him. I see it all now. That is what would have happened to our gardener who ruined the gatekeeper's daughter, if the man had not left England. She was only a girl—hardly grown; yes, it all comes back to me. I remember what my husband did." She was still speaking under her breath, reciting the story more to herself than to Martha, her voice rising and falling, at times hardly audible. "Nothing—happened then—because my husband—did not find the man."

She faced the nurse again. "You won't let him come here, will you, Martha?"

"He'll come, my lady, if Stephen can get hold of him," came the positive reply. "He had a room in a lodging-house not far from here, but he left it, and Stephen doesn't know where he's gone. But he'll turn up again down at the shop, and then——"

"But you must not let him come," she burst out.

Again she sat upright. "I won't have it—please—*please!* I will go away if you do, where nobody will ever find me. I could not have him see me—see me like this." She looked at her thin hands and over her shabby gown. "Not like *this!*"

"No, you won't go away, my lady." There was a ring of authority now in the nurse's voice. "You'll stay here. It's the only way out of this misery for you. As for Mr. Felix and that scoundrel who has ruined you, Mr. Felix will take care of him. But I'm going to let Mr. Felix in, if the dear Lord will let him come. Mr. Felix loves you and——"

Her body stiffened. "He never loved me. He

only loved his father," she cried angrily, and again she sank back on her pillow. "All my misery came from that."

Martha bent closer. "You never got that right, my lady," she returned firmly. "You mustn't get angry with me, for I got to let it all out." She was the nurse no longer; no matter what happened, she would unburden her heart. "Mr. Felix isn't like other men. He stood by his father and helped him when he was in trouble, just as he'll stand by and help you, just as he helps everybody—Tom Moulton's daughter for one, that he picked up on the streets of London and sent home to her mother. If he'd killed Sam Lawson, who ruined her, he'd have given him what he deserved; and if he kills this man Dalton, he won't give him half what he deserves or what's coming to him sooner or later. Dalton isn't fit to live. He got Sir Carroll O'Day all tangled up so that his character and all his money was hanging by a thread, and then, when Mr. Felix gave up what he had to save Sir Carroll, Dalton coaxed you away. You didn't know that, did you? But it's true. That man Dalton ruined Mr. Felix's father. Oh, I know it all—and I have known it for a long time. Stephen told me all about it. No, don't stop me, my lady! I'm your old Martha, who's nursed you and sat by you many a night, and I'll never stop loving you as long as I live. I don't care what you do to me or what you have done to yourself. Your leaving Mr. Felix was like a good many other things you used to do when you were crossed. You would have your

way, just as your father will have his way, no matter who is hurt. What Lord Carnavon wants, he wants, and there is no stopping him. Anybody else but his lordship would have hushed the matter up, instead of ruining everybody. But that's all past now; I don't love you any less for it; I'm only sorrier and sorrier for you every time I think of it. Now we've got to make another start. Stephen'll help and I'll work my fingers to the bone for you—and Mr. Felix'll help most of all."

Except for the gesture of surprise when Dalton's part in the ruin of her husband's father was mentioned, Lady Barbara had listened to the breathless outburst without moving her head. Even when the words cut deepest she had made no protest. She knew the nurse's heart, and that every word was meant for her good. Her utter helplessness, too, confronted her, surrounded as she was by conditions she could neither withstand nor evade.

"And if he comes, Martha," she asked in a low, resigned voice, "what will happen then?"

"He'll get you out of this—take you where you needn't work the soul out of you."

"Pay for my support, you mean?" she asked, with a certain dignity.

"Of course; why not?"

"Never—*never!* I will never touch a penny of his money—I would rather starve than do it!"

"Oh, it wouldn't be much—he's as poor as any of us. When Stephen saw him last, all he had was a rubber

coat to keep him warm. But little as he has you'll get half or all of it."

"Poor as—any of us! Oh, my God, Martha!" she groaned, covering her face with her hands. "I never thought it would come to that—I never thought he could be poor! I never thought he would suffer in that way. And it is my fault, Martha—all of it! You must not think I do not see it! Every word you say is true—and every one else knows that it is true. It was all vanity and selfishness and stubbornness, never caring whom I hurt, so that I had the things I wanted. I put the blame on my husband a while ago because I did not want you to hate me too much. All the women who do wrong talk that way, hoping for some comforting word in their misery. But it is I who am to blame, not he. I talk that way to myself in the night when I lie awake until I nearly lose my mind. Sometimes, too, I try to cheat myself by thinking that all these terrible things might not have happened had God not taken my baby. But I don't know. They might have happened just the same, my head was so full of all that was wicked. When I think of that, I am glad the baby died. It could never have called me mother. Oh, Martha, Martha, take me in your arms again—yes, like that—close against your breast! Kiss me, Martha, as you used to do when I was little! You do love me, don't you? And you will promise not to let my husband see me? And now go away, please, and leave me alone. I cannot stand any more."

CHAPTER XVI

The talk with Father Cruse, while it had calmed and, to a certain extent, reassured Felix, had not in any way swerved him from his determination to find his wife at any cost.

The only change he made in his plans was one of locality. Heretofore, with the exception of his visits to Stephen—long since discontinued now that he feared she was an outcast—he had mingled with the throngs crowding the Great White Way ablaze with light or had haunted the doors of the popular theatres and expensive restaurants, and the waiting-rooms of the more fashionable hotels. After this it must be the byways, places where the poor or worse would congregate: cheap eating-houses; bar-rooms, with so-called "family rooms" attached; and always the streets at a distance from those trodden by the rich and prosperous classes. Father Cruse might have been right in his diagnosis, and the sleeve-button might form but a minor link in the chain of events circling the problem to the solution of which he had again consecrated his life, but certain it was that the clew Kitty had discovered had only strengthened his own convictions. If the woman whom Kitty had picked up some months before, and put to bed, were

not his wife, she must certainly have been near her person; which still meant not only poverty but the possibility of Dalton's having abandoned her. Possibly, too, this woman, whose outside garments had contrasted so strangely with her more sumptuous underwear, might have been an inmate of the same house in which his wife was living—some one, perhaps, in whom his wife had had confidence. Perhaps —no! That was impossible. Whatever the depths of suffering into which his wife had fallen, she had not yet reached the pit—of that he was convinced. If he were mistaken—at the thought his fingers tightened, and his heavy eyebrows and thin, drawn lips became two parallel straight lines—then he would know exactly what to do.

These convictions filled his mind when, having bid good-by to Kitty—who knew nothing of his interview with the priest—he buttoned his mackintosh close up to his throat, tucked his blackthorn stick under his arm, and, pressing his hat well on his head, bent his steps toward the East Side. A light rain was falling and most of the passers-by were carrying umbrellas. Overhead thundered the trains of the Elevated—a continuous line of lights flashing through the clouds of mist. Underneath stretched Third Avenue, its perspective dimmed in a slowly gathering fog.

As he tramped on, the brim of his soft hat shadowing his brow, he scanned without ceasing the faces of those he passed: the men with collars turned up, the women under the umbrellas—especially those with small feet.

At 28th Street he entered a cheap restaurant, its bill of fare, written on a pasteboard card and tacked on the outside, indicating the modest prices of the several viands.

He had had no particular reason for selecting this eating-house from among the others. He had passed several just like it, and was only accustoming himself to his new line of search; for that purpose, one eating-house was as good as another.

Drawing out a chair from a table, he sat down and ran his eye over the interior.

What he saw was a collection of small tables, flanked by wooden chairs, their tops covered with white cloths and surmounted by cheap casters, a long bar with the usual glistening accessories, and a flight of steps which led to the floor above. His entrance, quiet as it had been, had evidently attracted some attention, for a waiter in a once-white apron detached himself from a group of men in the far corner of the room and, picking up, as he passed, a printed card from a table, asked him what he would have to eat.

Nothing—not now. I will sit here and smoke." He loosened his mackintosh and drew his pipe from his pocket, adding: "Hand me a match, please."

The waiter looked at him dubiously. "Ain't you goin' to order nothin'?"

"Not yet—perhaps not at all. Do you object to my smoking here?"

"Don't object to nothin', but this ain't no place to warm up in, see!"

Felix looked at him, and a faint smile played about his lips—the first that had lightened them all day. "I shan't ask you to start a fresh fire," he said in a decided tone; "and now, do as I bid you, and pass me that box of matches."

The man caught the tone and expression, placed the box beside him, and joined the group in the rear. There was a whispered conference, and a stout man wearing a dingy jacket disengaged himself from the others and lounged toward Felix.

"Nasty night," he began. "Had a lot of this weather this month. Never see a December like it."

"Yes, a bad night. Your servant seemed to think I was in the way. Are you the proprietor?"

"Well, I am one of them. Why?"

"Nothing—only I hoped to find you more hospitable."

"Oh, smoke away—guess we can stand it, if you can. Dinner's over"—he looked at the big clock decorating the white wall—"but they'll be piling in here after the theatres is out. You live around here?"

"No, not immediately."

"Looking for any one?"

Felix gave a slight start and, from under his narrowed lids, shot one of his bull's-eye flashes.

The man caught the flash and, misinterpreting it, bent down and said in a hoarse whisper: "Come from the central office, don't you?"

Felix took a long puff at his pipe. "No, I am only a very tired man who has come in out of the wet to rest

and smoke," he answered, with a dry smile, "but if it will add to your comfort and improve your hospitality in any way, you can send your waiter back here and I will order something to eat."

The stout man laid his hand confidently on Felix's shoulder. "That's all right, pard—I ain't worryin', and don't you. There's nothin' doin', and I'm a-givin' it to you straight."

Felix nodded in dismissal, rested his elbows on the table, and again puffed away at his brierwood. Being mistaken for a central office detective might or might not be of assistance. At present, he would let matters stand.

As he smoked on, the room, which had been almost entirely empty of customers, began filling up. A reporter bustled in, ordered a cup of coffee, and, clearing away the plates and casters, squared his elbows and attacked a roll of paper. Two belated shop-girls entered laughing, hung their wet waterproofs on a hook behind their chairs, and were soon lost in the intricacies of the printed menu. Groups of three and four passed him, beating the rain from their hats and cloaks, the women stamping their wet feet.

The sudden influx from the outside, bringing in the wet and mud of the streets, had started innumerable puddles over the clean, sanded floor. The man wearing the dingy white jacket craned his head, noticed the widening pools, opened a door behind the bar leading to the cellar below, and shouted down, in a coarse voice, "Here, Stuffy, git busy—everything

slopped up," and resumed his place beside the group of men, their talk still centred on the stranger in the mackintosh, who could be seen scrutinizing each new arrival.

Something in the poise and dignity of the object of their attention as he sat quietly, paper in hand, a curl of blue smoke mounting ceilingward from his pipe, must also have impressed the newcomers, for no one of them drew out any of the empty chairs immediately beside him, although the room was now comparatively crowded. Finally, the man who answered to the name of "Stuffy" appeared from the direction of the group near the bar, and made his way toward Felix. He carried a broom and a bucket, from which trailed a mop used for swabbing wet floors. When he reached O'Day's table, he dropped to his knees and attacked a sluiceway leading to a miniature lake, fed by the umbrellas and waterproofs belonging to the two girls opposite.

"Got to ask ye to move a little, sir," he said in apology.

"Hold on," replied Felix, in considerate tones, "I will stand up and you can get at it better. Bad night for everybody." He was on his feet now, his long mackintosh hanging straight, his hat still on his head, and in his hand the blackthorn stick, which he had picked up from beside the table as he rose.

The man stared at the mackintosh, the hat, and the cane, and sprang to his feet. "I know ye!" he cried excitedly. "Do you know me?"

Felix studied him closely. "I do not think I do," he answered, frowning slightly.

"Well, ye ought to. I ain't never forgot ye, and I never will. You give me a meal once and a dollar to keep me going."

O'Day's brow relaxed. "Yes, now I do. You are the man whose wife left him, and who tried to steal my watch."

"That's it—you got it. You didn't give me away. Say, I been straight ever since. It's been tough, but I kep' on—I work here three nights in the week and I got another job in a joint on Second Avenue. Say—" he added, glancing furtively over his shoulder. Then finding his suspicions confirmed, and the attention of the group fastened on him, he began to push the broom vigorously, muttering in jerks to Felix: "This ain't no place for ye—git into trouble sure—what yer doin' here?—They're onto ye, or the bunch wouldn't have their heads together—don't make no difference who's here, everybody gits pinched—I can't talk—they'll git wise and fire me."

Felix's lip curled and an amused expression drifted over his face. His jaws set, the muscles forming little ridges about his ears.

"I will attend to that later," he said, in a firm voice. "Keep on with your work."

He shook the ashes from his pipe, resumed his seat, and leaned carelessly forward with his elbows on his thighs, his former protégé, now deep in his work, squeezing the wet rag into the bucket, and using the broom

where the mud was thickest. When the swabbing-up process brought the man within speaking distance again Felix leaned still further forward and asked:

"What sort of a place is this—a restaurant?"

The man turned his head. He was again on his knees, and had drawn nearer. He was now wiping the same spot so as to be within reach of Felix's ear.

"Downstairs—yes," he returned in a low voice. "Upstairs—in the rear—across a roof—" He glanced again at the group and stopped.

"A gambling house?"

"No—a pool-room. That's why I give ye the tip."

Felix ruminated, the man polishing vigorously. "What kind of people come here?"

"The kind ye see—and crooks."

"Do you know them all?"

"Why not? I been workin' here two months. Had two raids—that's why I posted ye. It's the chop-house game now, with a new deal all around, but they're onto it—so a pal of mine tells me."

Again Felix ruminated. "Women ever come here?"

"Oh, yes, up to ten o'clock or so—telephone operators, shop-girls—that kind. Two of 'em are over there now; they work in Cryder's store Christmas and New Year's, and they get taken on extra."

"Any others?"

"You mean fancies?"

"No—straight, decent women, who may live around here and who come regularly in for their meals."

"Oh, yes—but they don't stay long. And then"—

he nodded toward the group—"they don't want 'em to stay—no money in grub. Just a bluff they've put up."

"Have you come across your wife since I saw you?"

"No, and don't want to. I've got all over that. A man's a damn fool to get crazy over a woman, and a bigger damn fool to keep worryin' when she goes back on him. They ain't wuth it, none on 'em."

"What became of the man she went off with?"

"Got tired and chucked her, after he made a tank of her. That's what they all do."

"Have you ever tried to find her?"

"What for?"

"You might do her some good."

"Cut it out! Nuthin' doin'! She was rotten when she left me, and she's rotten now. Bums round a Raines joint over here on Twenty-eighth Street. Pick up anybody. Came staggerin' into the church full of booze, so a pal o' mine told me, and got half-way down the aisle before they could fire her. Drop in there sometime when you go by and ask the sexton if I'm a-lyin'. No more of that for me, I'm through. There ain't but one place for that kind, and that's Blackwell's Island, and that's where they fetch up. I went through hell afore I saw you because of her, and I'm just pullin' out and I want to stay out."

He raised his head, glanced furtively again at the group by the bar, and in a low whisper muttered:

"I've got to go now. They'll get onto me next."

"Never mind those men. They cannot harm you,"

Felix answered, and was about to add some word of sympathy, when he checked himself. It would only hurt him the more, he thought. He said instead, his voice conveying what his lips would have uttered:

"Do you like it here?"

"Got to."

Felix pushed back his chair, stood erect, and with a gesture as if his mind had been made up said: "Would you care to do something else?"

The man dropped his broom and straggled to his feet. "Can ye give me somethin'? I been a-tryin' everywhere, but this kind o' work hoodoos a man, and they won't give me no ref'rence 'cause I don't git more'n my board and they don't want to lose me. And then" —here he winked meaningly—"I know a thing or two. But, say, do ye mean it? I'll go anywhere you want."

Felix felt in his pocket, drew out a card, and pencilled his address. "Come some night—say about eight o'clock. It's not far from here. I am glad you pulled yourself together and went to work. That is a good deal better than the business you tried to follow when we first met,"—and one of his dry smiles flickered about his mouth. "And now, good night," and he held out his hand.

The man drew back. It was a new experience. "You mean it?" he asked.

"Yes, give me your hand. Now that you are decent I want to shake it. That is the only way we can help each other."

Kitty was poring over her accounts when Felix arrived at the express-office and made his way to her sitting-room. She had had a busy day, the holiday season always bringing a rush of extra work, and her wagons had been kept going since daylight. The trend of travel was to Long Island and Jersey towns, the goods being mainly for the Christmas and New Year's festivities. John was away—somewhere between the Battery and Central Park—and so were Mike and Bobby, the boy having been pressed into service now that his vacation had begun.

"Are you too busy to talk to me, Mistress Kitty?" he said, stripping off his mackintosh and hanging it where its drip would do no harm.

"Too busy! God rest ye, Mr. O'Day! I'm never too busy to eat, sleep, look after John and Bobby, and listen to what ye've got to say. Hold on till I put these bills away. There ain't one of 'em'll be paid till after New Year—not then, if the customer can help it. They'll all spend their own money or somebody else's. There!"—and she laid the pile on a shelf behind her. "Now, go on—what's it ye want? Come, out with it; and mind, I've said 'Yes, and welcome' before ye've asked it."

O'Day, from his seat near the stove, studied her face for a moment, his own brightening as he felt the warmth of her loyalty. "Don't promise too much till you hear me out. I am looking for a job."

Kitty turned quickly, her eyes two round O's, all the ruddiness gone from her cheeks. "Mr. O'Day! Why!

Why!—and what's Otto done to ye? I'll go to him this minute and——"

Felix laughed gently. "You will do nothing of the kind. Mr. Kling is all right and so am I. I want the job for a tramp who tried to hold me up one night, and who is now scrubbing the floor in a rather disreputable public house on Third Avenue."

Kitty let out all her breath and brought her plump hands down on her plump knees, her body rocking as she did so. "Oh, is that it? What a start ye give me! I thought ye and Kling had quarrelled. Sure, I'll take your tramp if ye say so. We want a man to wash the wagons, and help Mike clean up. John fired the macaroni we had last month and I didn't blame him. What can yer man do?"

"Not much."

"What do ye know about him?"

"Nothing, except that he tried to rob me."

"And what do ye want me to take him on for? To have him get away some night with a Saratoga trunk and——"

"No, to *keep* him from getting away with it. He's been on the ragged edge of life for some months, if I read him aright, and has all he can do to keep his footing. I found him a while ago by the merest accident, and he is still holding on. A week with you and your husband will do him more good than a legacy. He will get a new standard."

"What's he been doin' that he's up against it like this?" she asked, ignoring the compliment.

"Trying to forget a wife who went back on him—so he tells me."

"Has he done it?"

"Yes. If you can believe him. She has become a drunkard."

"Well—that's about the worst thing can happen to a man—if he's telling ye the truth. What's become of her?"

"He did not say. All I know is that he has not seen her since she went away."

"Maybe he didn't want to," she flashed back. "Did ye get out of him whose fault it was?"

Felix, whose remarks had been addressed to the red-hot coals in the stove, glanced quickly toward Kitty, but made no answer.

"Ye don't know, that's it, and so ye don't say. I'll tell ye that it's the man's fault more'n half the time."

"And what makes you think so, Mistress Kitty?" he asked, trying to speak casually, not daring to look at her for fear she would detect the tremor on his lips, wondering all the time at her interest in the subject.

"It ain't for thinkin', Mr. O'Day, it's just seein' what goes on every day, and it sets me crazy. If a man's got gumption enough to make a girl love him well enough to marry him, he ought to know enough to keep it goin' night and day—if he don't want her to forget him. Half of 'em—poor souls!—are as ignorant as unborn babes, and don't know any more what's comin' to them than a chicken before its head's cut off.

She wakes up some mornin' after they've been married a year or two and finds her man's gone to work without kissin' her good-by—when he was nigh crazy before they were married if he didn't get one every ten minutes. The next thing he does is to stay out half the night, and when she is nigh frightened to death, and tells him so with her eyes streamin', instead of comfortin' her, he tells her she ought to have better sense, and why didn't she go to sleep and not worry, that he was of age and could take care of himself—when all the time she is only lovin' him and pretty near out of her mind lest he gets hurted. And last he gets to lyin' as to where he *has* been—maybe it's the lodge, or a game in a back room, or somethin' ye can't talk about—anyhow, he lies about it, and then she finds it out, and everything comes tumblin' down together, and the pieces are all over the floor. That runs on for a while, and pretty soon in comes a dandy-lookin' chap and tells her she's an abused woman—and she *has* been—and he begins pickin' up the scraps and piecin' them together, tellin' her all the time the pretty things the first man told her and which, fool-like, she believes over agin, and then one fine day she skips off and the husband goes round, tearin' his hair with shame or shakin' his fist with rage, and says she broke up his home, and if she ever sets foot on his doorstep again he'll set the dogs on her, or let her starve before he'd give her a crumb. Don't it make you laugh? It does me. And you should see 'em swell round and air their troubles when most everybody knows just what's happened from the be-

ginnin'! If it was any of my business, I'd let out and tell 'em so.

"What my John knows, I know; and what I know, he knows. There's never been a time, and there ain't one now, when I'm beat out and my bones are hangin' stiff in me—and I get that way sometimes even now—that I don't go to John and say, 'John, dear, get yer arms around me and hold me tight, I'm that tired,' and down goes everything, and he's got my head on his shoulder and pattin' my cheeks, and up I get all made over new, and him too. That's the way we get on, and that's the way they all ought to get on if——"

She paused, stretching her neck as if for more air.

"God save me! Will ye hear me run on? And ye sittin' there drinkin' it all in, not knowin' a word about the women and carin' less. Ye've got to forgive me, for I'm like John's alarm-clock in this wife business, and when I'm wound up I keep strikin' until I run down. Whew! What a heat I got myself into! Now go on, Mr. O'Day. What'll I pay him, and when's he comin?"

Felix waved his hand deprecatingly. "And so you never think, Mistress Kitty, that it may be the woman's fault?"

"Yes, sometimes it is. Faults on both sides, maybe. If it's the woman's fault, it always begins when she lets her man do all the work. Look up and down 'The Avenue' here! Every wife is helpin' her husband in his business, and every wife knows as much about it

as the man does. That ain't the way up around Central Park. Half of 'em ain't out of bed till purty nigh lunch-time. I've heard 'em all talk; and worse yet, they glory in it. What can ye expect when there ain't five of 'em to a block who knows whether her husband has made a million in the past year or whether he's flat broke, except what he tells her? No wonder, when trouble comes, they shift husbands as they do their petticoats, and try it over again with a new one!"

"And if she takes this last plunge, when will she wake up to her mistake?" asked Felix, in a low voice.

"Oh, ye can't always tell. It'll generally run on for a while until she starts up and stares about her like she's been in a trance or a nightmare, and then the dear God help her after that, for nobody else can—nor will! That's the worst of it—*nor will!* John was readin' out to me the other night about the Red Cross Society for pickin' up wounded off the battle-field, and carryin' them in where they can be patched up again and join their companies when they get well. Why don't they have a Red Cross for some of the poor girls and wives who are hurted—hundreds of 'em lyin' all over the lot—and patch 'em up and bring 'em back to their homes? Now I'm done."

"No! Not yet. One more question. After the last nightmare, what?"

"The gutter—or worse—that's what! And when it's all over, most people say: 'Served her right—she had a happy home once, why didn't she stay in it?' And somebody else says: 'She was always wild and

foolish—I knew her as a girl.' And some don't say a blessed word because they couldn't dirty their clean lips with her name—the hypocrites!—and so they cart off her poor body and dump it in a lot back of Calvary cemetery. Oh, I know 'em, and that's what makes me get hot under the collar every time I get talkin' as I've been to-night!—And now let's quit it. If yer dead-beat wants a job, and we can keep him from stealin' the tires off the wagon and the shoes off my big Jim, he can come to work in the mornin', and John will pay him a dollar a day and he can sleep over the stables. And if he's decent, he can come in here once in a while and I'll warm him up with a cup of coffee. I'm glad to take him on just because ye want it—and ye knew that before I said it, for there's nothin' I wouldn't do for ye, and ye know that, too. Listen! That's John drivin' in, and I'm going out to meet him."

CHAPTER XVII

To the fears already possessing Lady Barbara a new one had now been added, freezing her blood and leaving her prostrate and helpless, like a plant stricken by an icy blast.

There had been no sleep for her after Martha's revelations regarding the presence of Felix in town, and turn as she would on her pillow, she could not escape the dread of one hideous possibility—her meeting him face to face, uncovering to his penetrating gaze her shame.

That he had had any other purpose in pursuing her across the sea than to humiliate and punish her, she did not believe. No man, certainly no man as proud as her husband, would forgive a woman who had trailed his ancestral name in the mud, and made his family life a byword in clubs and drawing-rooms. That Martha believed he could still love her was natural. Such good souls, women of the people, who had always led restrained and wholesome lives, would believe nothing else, but not a woman of her own class. She had only to recall a dozen instances where the bonds of marriage had been broken, with all the attendant scandal and misery, to be convinced of what would befall her were she and Felix to meet.

Her one hope was that her husband, baffled in his

search, had left the city, and that neither Martha nor Stephen would ever see him again. Their inability to find him of late might mean that he had given up the search, having found no trace of her during all the months in which he had been trying to find her. Or it might mean that he, too, had succumbed to the same poverty which she had endured and, being no longer able to maintain himself in the great city, had sought work elsewhere.

As the thought of this last possibility suddenly took possession of her, her heart gave a great bound of relief, and in the quiet that ensued, a certain tenderness for the man whom she had wronged began to well up within her. She recalled their early life and his unfailing generosity. Never in all the years she had known him had he refused her the slightest thing which could, in any way, add to her happiness. Indeed, he had often denied himself many of the luxuries to which a man of his tastes and training was entitled, in order to add to her store. Nor had he ever restrained her in her whims or her extravagance, and never, in any way, had he curtailed her freedom. She had been free to come and free to go, and with whom she pleased. Her intimacy with Dalton had been proof of all this, as well as her friendships with various men to whose companionship many another husband might have objected. "All right, Barbara," was his invariable reply; "you will get over your youth one of these days, and then you and I will settle down."

Even when the financial crash had come, he had

begged her to go with him to Australia, where he had important family connections, and where he could build up his fortunes anew. It was by no means certain, he had told her, that he was entirely ruined. His father's estate, when all the debts were paid, might still leave a surplus. There was some land just outside of London, too, on the line of suburban improvement, and this, with the title which had come to him with his father's death, would doubtless, after a few years, enable them to return to England and resume their former position. She remembered very well the night he had pleaded with her, and she remembered, too, with a gripping at her heart, her own contemptuous answer, and her departure the next morning for her father's roof. And then the lie she had told!—that Felix had bluntly announced to her his plan for raising sheep in Australia, ordering her to get ready to go with him at once.

She recalled, too, this time with burning cheeks, a certain unsigned letter, in an unknown hand, which had reached her after her flight with Dalton, describing her husband as stunned and dazed by the blow, the writer denouncing her for her desertion, and warning her of the retribution in store for her if she remained with a man like the one on whom she had staked her future happiness. She had laughed at its contents and tossed it across the table to Dalton, who had read it with a smile, caught it between a pair of tongs and, lighting a match, held it over the flame until it was consumed.

Then—as, tortured by these recollections, she lay staring at the dark—Martha's prediction, based on Stephen's, belief, that Felix would kill Dalton at sight, rose up in her mind, and with it came another great fear—one that, for a moment, stopped her heart from beating and left her numb. In the quick succession of blows that Martha had dealt, she had not fully grasped this part of the story. Now she did. That her husband was capable of it she fully believed. Quiet, reticent men like Felix—men who had served their country both in India and Egypt—men who never boasted, who never discussed their intentions or plans until they were carried out, were the men to take the law into their own hands when their honor was involved, no matter who was hurt. Such a catastrophe would not only bring to light her own misery, but the unavoidable publicity would tarnish still further the good name of her people at home. Even were only an attempt on Dalton's life made, and an official investigation held—as she was convinced would be the case—the scandal would be almost as bad. Rather than have this occur she would make any sacrifice, even that of humiliating herself on her knees before Felix—begging his forgiveness, not for the sake of the man she now feared and detested, but for the sake of her father at home, and to shield her own identity. She feared, too, for Felix. He, of all men, should be saved from committing such an act.

With this a sudden resolve born of her fears and shattered nerves took possession of her. She would

not only see her husband whenever he came, but she would send word in the morning to Stephen to redouble his search, leaving no stone unturned until he was found.

Nothing of all this did she say to Martha, who helped her dress, watching the dark circles beneath the eyes. Breakfast over, she silently took her seat by the window, drew from the big paper box at her feet her several pieces of lace, including the mantilla, and began to work.

As she held up to the light the ragged tear in the Spanish lace, and noted the width and length of the gash in its delicate texture, her heart sank. She saw at a glance that she could not finish it before closing time, even if she devoted the whole day to its repair. Better complete, thought she, the other and smaller pieces—one a fichu of Brussels lace, and the others some embroidered handkerchiefs on which she was to place monograms. These she would finish and take to Mangan. When he saw how tired she was, he would accept her excuses and give her another day for the large and more important piece. She did not have to leave the house until four o'clock, and as Martha was to be out most of the day, she could work on without distraction of any kind.

When, at noon, Martha left her, with a caressing pat of the hand, promising to be back in time for supper, the anxious, weary woman picked up her needle again, her fingers darting in and out like shuttles, her shoulders aching with the strain, her mind still

intent on the problems which had tortured her all night, and only rousing herself when the clock in a neighboring tower struck four. Then she gathered up her work, wrapped the whole in the same sheet of tissue-paper in which the several pieces had been packed, and, adjusting her hat and cloak, started for Rosenthal's.

Mangan, who was in charge of the department, had been waiting for her in a small room off the repair shop, and as he caught sight of her frail figure making her way toward him, rose to greet her. "Well, I'm glad you've come," he began, as she reached his desk. "Brought that Spanish piece, didn't you? Ought to have had it last night."

She tried to smile, but his face was too forbidding. "No, I am sorry to say that——"

"You didn't! What have you done with it?"

"I could not finish it. I have brought everything else. I will have it for you in the morning."

Mangan looked at her curiously, a smirk of suspicion crossing his narrow fox face. "Oh! You'll bring it to-morrow, will you?" he sneered. "Well, do you know that to-morrow's New Year's Eve and that this mantilla's got to be delivered to-night? They have been telephoning all day for it. To-morrow, eh? Well, don't that make you tired! It does me."

An indignant protest quivered through her, but she dared not show resentment. Only within the last few months had she been subjected to these insults, and only her helplessness had compelled her to bear them.

"I am very sorry," she answered simply, and with a certain dignity. "I have not been very well. I have done all I could. The damage was greater than I expected. Some of the threads must be entirely restored."

"What time to-morrow?" Every kind of excuse known to the shop-worker had been poured into his ears. Very few of them contained a particle of truth.

"Before noon, if I can; certainly by four o'clock."

"Four o'clock?" he roared. He had already made up his mind that she was lying, but there was no use in his telling her so, nor would any time be gained by taking the work from her and handing it over to another employee.

"Four means eight, I guess. What's the matter with ten o'clock? I got to have that sure, and no monkeying. Can't you brace up and jam it through?"

"I will try." Her cheeks were burning under the sting of his coarse lashes.

"Try! You bet you'll try! Better get home right away. Give me that bundle—I'll have it checked up, so you won't lose no time."

She bit her lip, her whole nature in revolt, but she made no reply. Too much was at stake for her to show anger at such coarseness. She had no rights that he was bound to respect. She was only one of his work-girls, and her short experience had shown her that but few of her associates received better treatment from him.

"Thank you," was all she said as, with downcast eyes, she picked her way through the crowded workroom,

down the long, steep staircase reserved for employees, and so on to the street. There she caught a Third Avenue car and sank into a seat near the door, encroaching upon her small reserve of pennies to reach home the sooner. She saw but too clearly that not only did her present position depend on her returning the mantilla at the earliest possible moment, but that, exhausted as she was, she must utilize the few remaining minutes of daylight as well as the earlier hours of the morning to keep her promise. To work long at night she knew was impossible. She had not the eyes to follow the intricacies of the meshes with no other light than that afforded by Martha's kerosene lamp. She had tried it before, and had been forced to stop.

When she reached the cross street leading to Martha's door, she hurried from the car, caught her skirts in her hand, a habit of hers when nervously hurried, and, summoning up all her strength, sped on, mounting the narrow, rickety steps with but a pause for breath on the last landing. Once there, she took her latch-key from her pocket and unlocked the door, leaving it on the jar, as she knew Martha might come in at any moment.

As she entered the humble apartment, its restful seclusion, after her experience with Mangan, sent a thrill of thankfulness through her. One after another the several objects passed in review—the kettle singing on the stove, its ample bed of coals warming the room; her own tiny chamber, leading out of the one

large room, with its small iron bedstead and white cotton quilt; the table with its lamp; the pine shelves with the few pieces of china, and even the big paper box in which her work was delivered and later returned to the shop, either by wagon or special messenger, and which Martha, before she had gone out, had placed on a chair near the door to keep it out of the dust. All told her of peace and warmth and comfort.

She lighted the lamp, picked up the box containing the mantilla, and half raised the lid, intending to place the contents on her sewing-table, but, catching sight of the kettle again, she let the box lid drop from her hands. She was chilled from the ride in the car, the water was boiling, and it would take but a minute to make herself a cup of tea. This would give her renewed strength for her task. Hardly had she drained her cup when she became conscious of a step on the stairs—a steady, firm step. Not Martha's nor that of the boy. Nor that of the expressman who often sought Martha's apartment.

As it approached the landing, a sickening faintness assailed her.

She had heard that step before.

It was Felix!

Her hour of trial had come!

He would find the door ajar, stride into the room with that quiet, self-contained manner of his; and she must face him and stand ashamed!

For a brief instant she wavered, her resolution of the morning, to throw herself at his feet, put to flight

by a sense of some impending terror. Should she spring forward and shut the door before he reached it, refusing to admit him until Martha came, or should she creep noiselessly into her room and lock herself in, remaining silent until he should leave the premises, believing no one at home? While she stood, half paralyzed with fear, the door moved gently, almost stealthily, swinging back half its width, and a man in cape-coat, and slouch hat drawn close over his eyes, stepped into the room.

Lady Barbara gave a piercing shriek, sprang from her seat, and staggered back, grasping a chair to keep her from falling. "How dare you, Guy Dalton, to——"

The intruder loosened the top button of his cape, watching, meanwhile, the terrified woman, and, with a sneer, said: "Oh, stop that, will you? I've had enough of it. You thought you could get away, did you? Well, you can't, and the sooner you find that out the better for you." He glanced coolly around the room. "So this is where you are, is it?—a rotten hole, anyhow. You might better have stayed where you were. Does Rosenthal pay you enough to keep this up, or is somebody else footing the bills? Now, you get your things on and be quick about it."

She had been edging toward her bedroom door all this time, her eyes glaring into his with the fierceness of a cornered animal, muttering as she stepped—one word at a time: "You—have—no—right—to—come—in—here."

"I haven't, haven't I? I'd like to know who has a better right?" he returned angrily.

"No, you have not." She was moving an inch at a time, keeping a chair between herself and Dalton, her eyes watching his every expression, her right hand stretched along the wall.

"Still at it, are you? Well, get through, and hurry up. I'll go where I please, and you'll come when I want you. Everybody is inquiring for you down at the house, and I promised them you would be back to-night, and you will. You were a fool to leave. It's a lot better than this. From what I heard last night, from one of Rosenthal's girls, I thought you had moved into something palatial."

She had reached the bedroom door now, and her hand was on the knob.

"Yes—that's right," he said, mistaking her purpose, "get into your wraps, and——"

The door closed with a sudden bang, and the inside bolt was pushed tight.

Dalton stood with his hands in his pockets. "Oh, that's the game, is it?" he called, in a loud voice. He saw he had been outwitted, and an oath escaped him. He saw, too, that the door was a heavy one, and the effort to force it might bring in the neighbors. "Well, there's no hurry. I can wait," he added savagely, "but if you know what's good for you, you'll come out now."

She had sunk down on her bed, hardly daring to breathe. Her only hope now lay in Martha, and she might not come back for an hour.

Dalton sauntered away from the door and began an inspection of the room. The box on the chair came first. He lifted the lid and drew out the mantilla. "Rather good, this—wonder how she got hold of it—Oh, yes, I see, she must be repairing it. There are her work-basket and the spools of black silk."

He turned to the box again and read the name of "Rosenthal" stencilled on the bottom. "So that is what she is doing—they did not tell me what she worked at." He spread out the mantilla again and looked it over carefully. Then a smile of cunning crossed his face. "Just what I want," he said, folding it up and tucking it inside his capacious cape.

He now made a tour of the room, his tread like that of a cat, lifted the plates on the dresser as if in search of something behind them, rummaged through the work-basket, opening and turning the leaves of a book lying on the table. So occupied was he that he did not hear Martha's noiseless step nor know that she had entered the room.

For a moment she stood watching his every movement. The man she saw was well-knit and rather handsome, not much over thirty, with clean-shaven face, drooping eyelids, and a hard-set lower jaw. She had a suspicion that it might be Dalton, but was not sure, never having seen him but once, when he was much younger.

"Who do you want to see?" she asked at last, in a firm voice.

Dalton wheeled sharply, and took her in with one

comprehensive glance. He had always prided himself on never having been outwitted or taken unawares, and that Lady Barbara could lock herself in her room, and that this woman could creep up behind him unobserved, rather nettled him.

"I don't know that it is any of your business, my good woman," he answered, his insolence increasing as he noticed how mild and inoffensive she appeared to be; "but if it makes any difference to you, I will tell you that I am waiting for my wife."

"Where is she?" Martha's voice was clear and incisive, with a ring of determination through it that, for the moment, disconcerted him.

Dalton pointed to the bedroom door.

Martha stepped across the room and tried the knob. "Open the door, Lady Barbara. It's Martha. Who is this man?"

The bolt shot back and Barbara's frightened face peered out. "Oh, thank God you have come!" she moaned, her teeth chattering. "It is Mr. Dalton. I ordered him from the room, and he would not go, and——"

"Oh, it's Mr. Guy Dalton, is it?" Martha cried, facing him. "The man who's been a curse to you ever since you met him. I know every crook and turn of you—you ought to be ashamed of yourself to treat a woman as you have treated Lady Barbara O'Day. Now, sir, this is my room and you can't stay in it a minute longer. There's the door!"

Dalton laughed a dry, crackling laugh. "You are

a regular virago, are you not, my dear woman?" he said. "Quite refreshing to hear your defense of a woman on whom I have spent every shilling I had. Now, do not get excited—cool down a bit, and we will talk it over—and while we are at it, please make me a cup of tea. It is about my hour. When my wife comes to her senses, as she will in a minute, she will get over her tantrums and think better of it."

Martha strode straight toward him until her capacious body was within a few inches of his shirt-front, her hands tightly clinched. "Don't make any mistake, Mr. Dalton. Your airs won't go here. My brother Stephen looks after me and after Lady O'Day, and he and another man you wouldn't care to meet are looking after you."

She called to her mistress: "Lock and bolt that door on you, and don't open it until I tell you."

Again she confronted Dalton, her contempt for him increasing as she caught the wave of anxiety that swept his face at her reference to the men who would help her. "Now, you can have just one minute to leave this room, Mr. Dalton," she cried, throwing back the door. "If you're over that time, the policeman on the block will help you down-stairs."

Dalton hesitated. The allusion to Stephen, whoever he might be, and to the other man, disturbed him. That the woman knew more of his history than she was willing at that time to tell was evident. That she was entirely in earnest, and meant what she said, and that it would be more than dangerous for him to defy

her, should she appeal to the police for help, were equally evident.

"Of course, my dear woman," he said, with assumed humility, his eyes glistening with anger, "if you do not want me to stay, I suppose I shall have to go. I did not come to make any fuss; I only came to take my wife home where I can take care of her. She seems to think she can get along without me. All right—I am willing she should try it for a while. She has my address, which is more than I had when she left me without a word of any kind."

He slid his hand under his cape to assure himself that the mantilla was safe and out of sight, picked up his hat, and stepped jauntily out, saying as he went down the staircase: "Next time, she will come to me. Do you hear? Tell her so, will you?"

CHAPTER XVIII

Sometimes on life's highway we meet a man who reminds us of one of those high-priced pears seen in fruiterers' windows: wholesome, good to look at, without a speck or stain on their smooth, round, rosy skins—until we bite into them. Then, close to their hearts, we uncover a greedy, conscienceless worm, gnawing away in the dark—and consign the whole to the waste-barrel.

Dalton, despite his alluring exterior, had been rotten at heart from the time he was sixteen years of age, when he had lied to his father about his school remittances, which the old man had duplicated at once.

That none of his associates had discovered this was owing to the fact that no one had probed deeper than the skin of his attractiveness—and with good reason: it was clean, good to look at, bright in color, a most welcome addition to any dinner-table. But when the drop came—and very few fruits can stand being bumped on the sidewalk—the revelation followed all the quicker, simply because bruised fruit rots in a day, as even the least qualified among us can tell.

And the bruises showed clearer as time went on. The lines in his once well-rounded, almost boyish face grew deeper and more strongly marked, the eyes shrank far back beneath the brows, the lips became

thinner and less mobile, the hair was streaked with gray, and the feet lacked their old-time spring.

With these there had come other changes. The smile which had won many a woman was replaced by a self-conscious smirk; the debonair manner which had charmed all who met him was now a mere bravado. His dress, too, showed the strain. While his collar and neckwear were properly looked after, and his face was clean-shaven, other parts of his make-up, especially his shoes and hat, were much the worse for wear.

This, then, was the man who, with thoughts intent on his last and most degrading makeshift, was forging his way up Second Avenue, the mantilla—the veriest film of old Salamanca lace—pressed into a small wad and stuffed in his inside pocket.

And now, while we follow him on his way up-town, it may be just as well for us to note that up to this precise moment our devil-may-care, still rather handsome Mr. Dalton, with the drooping eyelids and cold, hard lips, had entirely failed to grasp the idea that, in so far as public and private morals were concerned, he had in the last thirty minutes fallen to the level of a common sneak-thief.

His own reasoning, in disproof of this theory, was entirely characteristic of the man. While the pawning of one's things was of course unfortunate and might occasion many misunderstandings and much obloquy, such an act was not necessarily dishonest, because many gentlemen, some of high social position,

had been compelled to do the same thing. He himself, yielding to force of circumstances, had already pawned a good many things—his wife's first, and then his own—and would do it again under similar conditions. That the article carefully hidden in his pocket belonged to neither one of them, did not strike him as altering the situation in the slightest. The mantilla was of no value to him, nor, for that matter, to Lady Barbara. He would pawn it not alone for the sake of the money it would bring him, to tide him over his troubles until he could recover his losses—only a question of days, perhaps hours—but because, by means of the transaction, he would be enabled to restore harmony to a home which, through the obstinacy of a woman on whom he had squandered every penny he possessed in the world, had been temporarily broken up.

Should she rebel and refuse to join him—and she unquestionably had that right—he would carry out a plan which had come to him in a flash when he first picked it up. He would pawn it for what it would bring and, watching his chance some day when Lady Barbara was out at work, force his way into the apartment, slip the pawn-ticket where it could easily be found—behind the china or in among her sewing materials—and with that as proof, charge her with having stolen the lace, threatening her with exposure unless she yielded. If she relented, he would destroy the ticket and let the matter drop; if she continued obstinate, he would charge her companion with being

an accessory. The woman was evidently befriending Lady Barbara for what she could get out of her. Neither of them was seeking trouble. Between the two he could accomplish his purpose.

What would happen in the meanwhile, when she tried to account for its loss to Rosenthal, never caused him the slightest concern. She, of course, could concoct some story which they would finally believe. If not, they could deduct the value of the lace from her earnings.

He had the best of motives for his action. Their board bill was overdue. He was harassed by the want of even the small sums of money needed for car-fare, and of late it had become very evident that if they were to keep their present quarters—and he was afraid to try for any others—he must yield at once to the proprietor's pressing suggestion to "patch up his differences with his wife," and have her come home and once more take charge of the suite of rooms; the owner arguing that as Mr. and Mrs. Stanton were known to be "family people," a profitable little game free from police interruption might be carried on, the surplus to be divided between the "house and Mrs. Stanton's husband."

That she should decline again to be party to any such plan seemed to him altogether improbable, since all she had to do to insure them both comfort was to return home like a sensible woman, put on the best clothes she possessed—the more attractive the better, and she certainly was fetching in that wrapper—and be

reasonably polite to such of his friends as chose to drop in evenings for a quiet game of cards.

Moreover, she owed him something. He had made every sacrifice for her, shared with her his every shilling, making himself an exile, if not a fugitive, for her sake, and it was time she recognized it.

With the recall of these incidents in his checkered career a new thought blazed up in his mind—rather a blinding thought. As its rays brightened he halted in his course, and stood gazing across the street as if uncertain as to his next move. Perhaps, after all, it would be best *not* to pawn the mantilla. An outright sale would be much better. If this were impossible, it would be just as well to destroy the ticket and postpone his scheme for regaining possession of her person. While something certainly was due him—and she of all women in the world should supply it—forcing her to carry out the landlord's plan, now that he thought it over, might result in a certain kind of publicity, which, if his own antecedents were looked into, would be particularly embarrassing. She might —and here a slight shiver passed through him—she might, in her obstinacy, threaten him with the forged certificates, a result hardly possible, for no letters of any kind had reached her, none so far as he knew; neither had he ever discussed the incident with her, for the simple reason that women, as a rule, never understood such things. And yet how could he, as a financier, have tided over an accounting which, if allowed to go on, would have wiped out the savings of hundreds

who had trusted him and whom he could not desert in their hour of need, except by some such desperate means? Of course, if he had to do it all over again, he would never have locked up the stock-book in his own safe. That was a mistake. He ought to have left it with the treasurer. Then he could have shifted the responsibility.

Just here, oddly enough, he began to think of Felix—that cold-blooded, unimaginative man, who knew absolutely nothing about how to treat a woman, and, for that matter, knew nothing about anything else in so far as the practical side of life was concerned. The fool—here his brow knit—had not only broken up the final deal, in which everything had been fixed with Mullhallsen, the German banker, for an additional loan, but he had unearthed and compared certain certificates, in his fight to protect an obstinate old father. Worse still, he had taken himself off to Australia to starve, instead of saving what he could out of the wreck. Had he only listened to advice, the whole catastrophe might have been averted.

And this fool would have ruined his wife as well, had not he—Dalton—stepped in and saved her from burying herself in the wilderness.

As the memory of the scene with Felix when the stock-book was unearthed passed through his mind, his hand instinctively sought the bulge in his coat-pocket. He must get rid of it and at once. Just as the certificates had proved to be dangerous, so might this lace.

With this idea of his own peril possessing his mind, his whole manner changed. The air of triumph shown in his step and bearing when he left Martha's door, due to his discovery of the fugitive and the terror his presence had inspired, was gone. The old spectre always pursuing him stepped again to his side and linked arms. His slinking, furtive air returned, and a certain well-defined fear, as if he dreaded being followed, showed itself in every glance.

Suddenly he caught sight of a well-patronized retreat, owned and operated by a Mrs. Blobbs, the Polish wife of an English cheap John, and with a quick sliding movement, he paused in front of the narrow door. He had already taken in, from under his hat, the single gas-jet lighting up its collection of pinchbeck jewelry, watches, revolvers, satin shoes, fans, and other belongings of the unfortunate, and after peering up and down the street, he slipped in noiselessly, his countenance wearing that peculiar, shamefaced expression common to gentlemen on similar missions. That it was not his first experience could be seen from the way he leaned far over the counter, dropped the filmy wad, and then straightened back—the gesture meaning that if any other customer should come in while his negotiations were in progress, he was not to be connected in any way with the article.

"Something rather good," he said, pointing to the black roll.

The proprietress, a square-built woman, solid as a sack of salt, her waist-line marked by a string tight-

ened just above a black alpaca apron, her dried-apple face surmounted by a dingy lace cap topped with a soiled red ribbon, eyed him cautiously, and remarked, after loosening out the mantilla: "Dem teater gurls only vant such tings, and dey can pay nuddin'. No, I vouldn't even gif fife tollars. Petter dake it somevares else."

Dalton hesitated, turning the matter over in his mind. The transfer would bring him the desired pawn-ticket, but the five dollars was not sufficient to help him tide over the most pressing of his difficulties. He had borrowed double that sum two nights before, from the barkeeper of a pool-room where he occasionally played, and he dared not repeat his visit until he could carry him the money.

The male Blobbs, the taller and more rotund of the two shopkeepers—especially about the middle—now strolled in, leaned over the counter, and picking up the lace, held it to the overhead light. Looked at from behind, Blobbs was all shirt-sleeves and waistcoat, the back of his flat head resting like a lid on his shoulders. Looked at from the front, Blobbs developed into a person with shoe-brush whiskers bristling against two yellow cheeks, the features being the five dots a child always insists upon when drawing a face. Dalton saw at a glance that it was Mrs. Blobbs, and not Mr. Blobbs, who was in charge of the shop, and that any discussions with him as to the price would be useless.

"You're an Hinglishman, I take it," came from

the lowest dot of the five, a blurred and uncertain mouth.

Dalton colored slightly and nodded.

"Well, what I should adwise ye to do is to take this 'ere lace to some of them hold furnitoor shops. I know what this is. I 'ate to see a chap like ye put to it like this, that's why I tell ye. 'Ard on your woman, but—there's a shop hup on Fourth Avenue where they buy such things. A Dutchman by the name of Kling, right on the corner—you can't miss it. Take it hup to 'im and tell 'im I sent ye—we often 'elps one another."

Dalton crumpled up the black wad, slid the package under his coat, and without a word of thanks left the shop.

This was not the first time Blobbs had sent Kling a customer. Indeed, there had always been more or less of a trade between the two establishments. For, while Mrs. Blobbs had a license and could advance money at reasonable rates, her principal business was in old-clothes and ready-to-wear finery. Being near "The Avenue" and well known to its denizens, many of their outgrown and out-of-fashion garments had passed across her counter. Here the young man who pounded away on Masie's piano, the night of her birthday party, borrowed, for a trifle, his evening suit. Here Codman had exchanged a three-year-old overcoat, which refused to be buttoned across his constantly increasing girth, for enough money to pay for the velvet cuffs and collar of the new one purchased on

Sixth Avenue. Here Mrs. Codman bought remnants of finery with which to adorn her young daughter's skirts when she went to the ball given by the Washington chowder party. Here, too, was where the undertaker sold the clothes of the man who stepped off a ten-story building in the morning and was laid out that same night in Digwell's back room, his friends depositing a fresh suit for him to be buried in, telling the undertaker to do with the old one as he pleased. And to this old-clothes shop flocked many another denizen of side streets, who at one time or another had reached crises in their careers which nothing else could relieve.

Mrs. Blobbs's curt refusal to receive the lace only added fuel to the blazing thought that had flared up in Dalton's mind when he recalled the certificates. Holding on to them had caused one explosion. The mantilla might prove another such bomb. He dared not leave it at home and he could not carry it for an indefinite time on his person. If the man Kling would pay any decent price for it, he could have it and welcome.

With the grim spectre still linking arms with him he hurried on, making short-cuts across the streets, until he arrived at Kling's corner. At this point he paused. His terror must not betray him. Shaking himself free of the spectre, he assumed his one-time nonchalant air, entered the store and walked down the middle aisle, between the lines of sideboards, bureaus and high desks drawn up in dress parade. Over the barricade of the small office he caught the shine of

Otto's bald head, the only other live occupant, except Fudge, who had crept out from behind a bureau, and bounded back with a growl. Fudge had sniffed around the legs of a good many people, and might have written their biographies, but Dalton was new to him. Few thieves had ever entered Kling's doors.

"I have just left your old friends, Mr. and Mrs. Blobbs," he began gayly, "who have advised me to bring to you rather a rare piece of lace belonging to my wife. Fine, isn't it?" He loosened the bundle and shook out the folds of the mantilla.

Otto put on his glasses, felt the texture of the piece between his fingers, and spread out the pattern for closer examination. "Yes, dot's a good piece of lace. Vot you vant to do vid it? Dere's a hole in it, you see," and he thrust a pudgy finger into the gash.

"Yes, I know," returned Dalton, who, with his eye still on the dog, had been crushing it together so that the tear might not show; "but that is easily remedied. I want to sell it. Mr. Blobbs tells me it is worth a hundred dollars."

"Is dot so? Vell—vell—a hundred tollars! Dot's a good deal of money." He had begun to wrap it up, tucking in the ends. "No—dot Fudge dog don't bite—go away, you. T'ank you for lettin' me see it, tell Mr. Blobbs, but I don't vant it at dot price. And I doan know I vant it at any price. Dey doan buy dem t'ings any more."

Dalton saw that the mantilla had favorably impressed the dealer. He had caught the look of pleasure

when the lace was first unrolled, reading the man's brain as he had often read the brains of the men at home who listened to some rose-colored prospectus. These experiences had taught him that there was always a supreme moment when one must stop praising an article for sale, whether it were a rubber concession from an African chief or a pound of tea over a grocer's counter. This moment had arrived with Kling.

"I agree with you," he said smilingly. "The valuation was Mr. Blobbs's, not mine. I told him I should be glad to get half that amount—or even less."

Otto took the bundle and loosened the roll again. "I got a little girl, Beesving—dot was her dog make such foolishness—who likes dese t'ings. But dot is not business, for I doan sell it again once I gif it to her. I joost put it around her shoulders for a New Year's gift. Maybe if you—" He re-examined it closely, especially the tear, which had partly yielded to Lady Barbara's deft fingers and tired eyes. "Vell, I tell you vot I do, I gif you tventy tollars."

"That, I am afraid, will not answer my purpose," said Dalton. "Perhaps, however, you will loan me thirty dollars on it and hold the lace for a week or so, and I will pay you back thirty-five when some money that is due me comes in?"

Otto looked at him from under his bushy eyebrows. "Ve don't do dot kind of business. If I buy—I buy. If I sell—I sell. Sometimes I pay more as a t'ing is vorth. Sometimes I pay less. I have a expert vid me who knows vat dis is vorth, but he is busy vid a

customer on de next floor, and I doan sent for him. If you vant de tventy tollars you can have it. If you doan, den take avay de lace. I got a lot of t'ings to do more as to talk about it. Ven you see Blobbs, you tell him vat I say."

Dalton's mind worked rapidly. To take the money would clean off his debt and leave him a margin which he might treble before midnight.

"Give me the money," he said. "It is not one-third of its value, but I see that it is all I can do."

Otto smiled—the smile of a man who had hit the thing at which he aimed—felt in his inside pocket, drew out a great flat pocketbook, and counted out the bills.

Dalton swept them up as a winner at baccarat sweeps up his coin, apparently without counting them, stuffed the crumpled bank-notes into his pocket, and started for the door.

Half-way down the long shop he halted opposite a sideboard laden with old silver and glass and, to show that he was not in a hurry, paused for an instant, picking up a cut-glass decanter with a silver top, remarking casually, as he laid it back, "Like one I have at home," continuing his inspection by holding aloft a pipe-stem glass, to see the color the better.

As he resumed his walk to the door, Felix, with Masie and a customer ahead of him, was just descending the rear stairs from the "banquet hall" above. He thus had a full view of the store below. Something in the way with which the bubble-blown glass was

handled attracted O'Day's attention. He had seen a wrist with a movement like that, the poised glass firmly held in an outstretched hand. Where, he could not tell; at his own table, perhaps, or possibly at a club dinner. He remembered the quick, upward toss, the slender receptacle held high. He leaned far forward, and watched the nervous step and halting gait. Had Masie and the customer not been ahead of him, he would have hurried past them and called to the man to stop—not an unusual thing with him when his suspicions were aroused. Instead, he waited until he was well down the stairs, then strolled carelessly toward the door, intending to make some excuse to accost the man on the sidewalk. Not that he had any definite conviction regarding his likeness to the man he wanted; more to satisfy his conscience that he had permitted no clew to slip past him.

What made him hesitate was the way the slouch-hat shaded the intruder's face, the gas-jets not revealing the features. Only the end of the chin was visible, and the round of the lower cheek showing above the heavy cape-collar of the overcoat.

Dalton by this time had reached the street-door, which he closed gently behind him, holding it for an instant to prevent its making a noise. Felix lunged forward, reopened it quickly, and gazed out into the night. Dalton had vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed him.

Another man, who had kept his eyes on O'Day as he peered into the dark, an undersized, gaunt-looking

man, sidled toward Felix and pulled at his coat sleeve. "I ain't too early, am I? You said eight o'clock?"

Felix looked at him keenly. "Oh, yes, I remember—no, you are all right. How long have you been here?"

"About half an hour."

"Did you notice which way that man went who has just shut the door?"

The tramp looked about him in a helpless way. "I wasn't lookin'. I was a-watchin' you—waitin' for you to come out—but I got on to him when he went in awhile ago."

"Then you have seen him before?"

"Of course I've seen him before. He plays pool where I've been a-workin'."

Felix bent closer. "Do you know his name?"

"Sure! His name's Stanton. He's been puttin' sompin' to soak, I guess. I heard last week he was up against it. Do you know him?"

Felix remained silent a moment, checking his own disappointment, and then answered slowly: "I thought I did, but I see I am mistaken. Come inside the store where it is warmer. I have secured you a job, and will take you with me when I have finished here."

CHAPTER XIX

Had a spark of human feeling been left in Dalton's body, it would have been kindled into a flame of sympathy, could he have seen Lady Barbara when she opened the box early next morning, and stood trembling over the loss of the mantilla.

Her first hope was that she had inadvertently taken it to Rosenthal's with the other pieces of lace, and that Mangan had found it when he checked up her work. Then a cold chill ran through her, her anxiety increasing every moment. Had she dropped it in the street? Had the woman who jostled her on the way up the long staircase to the workroom, picked up her package when she stumbled? Perhaps some one had crept in during the night and, finding the box near the door, had caught up the mantilla and escaped without being detected? Could she herself have dragged it into her bedroom, entangled in the folds of her skirt? Was it not near the window, or in her basket, or behind the door, or——

Martha, with a shake of her head, put all these theories to flight.

"No, it isn't in your room at all, and it isn't anywhere else around here; and nobody's been in here

from the outside; and they couldn't get in if they tried, for I bolted the door when we went to bed. The only person who has had the run of the place is Mr. Dalton, and he——"

"Martha!"

"Well, I wasn't here when he first came, but when I opened the door he was peeking behind the china."

"But I had not been inside my room a minute before I heard your voice. How could he have taken it? You don't think——"

"I don't say what I think, because I don't know, but he's mean enough to do anything he could to hurt you. How long had he been talking to you when I came in?"

"Just long enough for me to run past him and lock myself in."

"And how long do you think it would take him to steal it, if he thought nobody was looking?"

"But he could not have stolen it, Martha; he was on the other side of the room. The box is by the door where I left it; you can see it for yourself. Oh! what shall I do? Where could I have dropped it? It must be at the store in that bundle. Mr. Mangan said I need not wait, and I did not see him open it. He has found it by this time and he is waiting for me. I will go right away and see him. Anybody could make a mistake like that. He must—he *will* understand when I explain it all. Get my cloak and hat, please, Martha. I will take the car up and back, and you can have my coffee ready for me upon my return. I won't be half

an hour. Oh! how awful it is, how awful! If I had only found it out last night! I had meant to work, but I could not after what happened. Mr. Mangan was very much put out yesterday, and I know he will be furious to-day. No, you need not come with me," and she was gone.

Martha closed the door, walked to the window, and stood looking through the panes until the slight figure had reached the street, where she caught up her skirt, to free her steps the better, and started on a run for the car line. When the fragile form was lost in the whirl of the traffic, Martha walked slowly to the table and sank into a chair, her elbows resting on its top, her face in her hand.

The next instant she was on her feet examining Lady Barbara's work-basket, wondering what Dalton had found in it, wondering, too, why he had looked through it. Crossing to the dresser, she moved the plates and cups, as he had done, searching for a possible note, or perhaps for a duplicate key of their former apartment which he might have left for Barbara, and then moved toward the door of the smaller chamber, behind which her mistress had lain shivering. Her eye now fell on the box, the lid awry. She remembered that this lid had been in that same position when she had ordered the intruder from the room, and that, at the time, she had thought it strange that Lady Barbara, always so careful, had not fastened it to keep the dust from its contents. Stooping closer, she examined the various articles. She noted that one

sleeve of the lace blouse had been lifted from its place, while the other sleeve remained snug where her mistress had tucked it. In pulling out one of the upper pieces, this sleeve must have been caught in its meshes and dragged clear. This could only have been done by the mantilla which, she distinctly remembered, had been laid neatly on top the afternoon before, so as to be ready for work in the morning.

"He's got it," she exclaimed in an excited tone, replacing the lid. "I'll stake my life he stole it, the dirty cur! He's done it to get even with her. She'll be back in a little while, half distracted. There is going to be trouble, plenty of it. I'll have Stephen here right away, and we'll talk it over. I can take care of her when she's inside these rooms, but what if that man waylays her on the street and raises a row, and she goes back to him to smooth over things? This has got to stop. She won't live the month out if he gets to hounding her again, and now he's found out where she is, I shan't have a moment's peace. What a hang-dog face he's got on him! And he's a coward, too, or he wouldn't have slunk out when I ordered him. And he had it on him all the time! I wonder what he'll do with it. Hold it over her, I expect; maybe take it to Rosenthal's with some lie about her, so they will discharge her and she come back to him.

"Maybe—" Here she stopped, and grew suddenly grave. "Maybe he'll— No, I don't think he'd dare do that, but I've got to get Stephen, and I'll go for him this minute. Going's quicker than a letter, and

I'll leave word down-stairs where I'm gone, so she'll know when she comes in, and I'll fix her coffee so she can get it."

Hurrying into her own room, she began changing her dress, putting on her shoes, taking her night cloak and big, flare bonnet from the hook behind the door, talking to herself as she moved.

"It's getting worse all the time, instead of getting better. God knows what's to become of her! She's most beat out now, and can't stand much more; and she's the best of the lot, except Mr. Felix, for she's clean inside of her, and only her heart is to blame—and that father of hers, Lord Carnavon, with his dirty pride, and this scoundrel she's wrecking her life on, and all the fine ladies at home who turned up their noses at her when half of them are twice as bad—oh, I know 'em—you can't fool Martha Munger! I've been too long with 'em. And this poor child who—Oh! I tell you this is a bad business, and it's getting worse—yes, it's getting worse. Rosenthal isn't going to stand losing that piece of lace, without its costing somebody some money. Stephen's got to come and be around evenings while I'm out. And I'll go with her to Rosenthal's and fetch her back home, so that man Dalton can't frighten the life out of her."

She put the coffee-pot where it would keep hot, and laid the cups and saucers ready for her mistress. This done, she shut the door, and made her way down-stairs. "Tell Mrs. Stanton when she comes in," she said to the old woman who acted as janitor, "that

I've gone to see my brother, and that I'll be back just as soon as I can."

All hopes which had cheered Lady Barbara on her way to Rosenthal's, even when she climbed the long stairs and was ushered into Mangan's small office, died out of her heart when she saw the manager's face. She had anticipated an outburst of anger, followed by a brutal tirade over her carelessness in wrapping up the mantilla with the other pieces and leaving it behind her the night before. Instead, he came forward to meet her—his lean, nervous body twitching with expectation.

"Well, this is something like! Didn't think you'd turn up for an hour. Let's have it." This with a low chuckle—the nearest he ever got to a laugh.

"Something dreadful has happened, Mr. Mangan," she began, stumbling over her words, her knees shaking under her. "I thought I had wrapped the mantilla up with the pieces I brought you last night, but I see now that——"

"You thought! Say, what are you giving me? Ain't you got it?"

"I have not, and I don't know what has become of it. It was not in the box this morning, and——"

"*It wasn't in the box this morning!*" he roared. "See here, what kind of a damn fool do you take me for?" He wheeled suddenly, caught her by the wrist, dragged her clear of the door, and shut it behind her.

"Now, Mrs. Stanton," he said, in cold, incisive tones, "let's you and I have this out, and I want to

tell you right here that I believe you're lying, and I've been suspecting it for some time. Now, make a clean breast of it. You've pawned it, haven't you?"

"I—pawn it? You think I— I won't allow you to speak to me in that way. I——"

"Oh, cut that out, it won't wash here. Now, listen! I've got to get that mantilla, see? And I'm going to get it if I go through every pawn-shop in town with a fine-tooth comb. I orter to have had better sense than to let you take it out of the shop. Now open up, and I'll help you straighten out things. Where is it? Come, now—no side-tracking."

She had sunk down on the chair, her fingers tightly interlocked, his words stunning her like blows. Their full meaning she missed in her dazed condition. All she knew was that, in some way, she must defend herself.

"Mr. Mangan, will you please listen to me? I have not pawned it, and I would never dream of doing such a thing. I can only think that some one has taken it from the box—I don't know who. I came to you the moment I discovered the loss. I thought perhaps I had wrapped it up with the other pieces I brought you last night, or that I had dropped it in the street on my way here. And, yet, none of these things seemed possible when I began to think about it. I will do all I can to pay for it. You can take its value from my work until it is all paid."

Mangan, who had been pacing the floor, hearing nothing of her explanation—his mind intent upon his next move—dragged a chair next to hers.

"Now, pull yourself together for a minute, Mrs. Stanton. I'm not going to be ugly. I'm going to make this just as easy as I can for you. You've got a lot of common sense, and you're some different from the women who handle our stuff. I've seen that, and that's why I've trusted you. Now, think of me a little. That mantilla don't belong to Rosenthal's. It belongs to a big customer who lives up near the Park, and who left it here on condition we had it mended on time. It's worth $250 if it's worth a cent, and it's worth a lot more to me, because I lose my job if I don't get hold of it to-day. It's a New Year's present and has got to be sent home to-night. Now, don't that make things look a little different to you? And now, one thing more, and I'm going to put it up to you, just between ourselves, and nobody will get onto it—nobody around here. If it's a matter of ten or fifteen dollars, I've got the money right here in my clothes. And you can slip out and I'll keep close behind, and you can go in and get it, and I'll bring it back here, and that's all there will be to it. Now, be decent to me. I've been decent to you ever since you come here. Ain't that so?"

Lady Barbara had now begun to understand. This man was accusing her of lying, if not of theft, while she sat powerless before him, incapable of speech. Once, as the horror of his suspicion rose before her, she felt a wild impulse to cry out, even to throw herself on his mercy—telling him her story and Martha's suspicions. Then the recollection of the cunning of

the man, his vulgarity, his insincerity, slowly steadied her. Her secret must be kept, and she must not anger him further.

"Perhaps, Mr. Mangan, if you came with me to my rooms, and saw my old—" she paused, then added softly, "the old woman I live with, and I showed you where the box is always kept and the way the door opens, perhaps you could help us to find out how it could have happened."

Mangan rose and pushed back his chair. "Well, you are the limit!" he gritted between his teeth. "I guess I'm in for it. The old man will be howling mad, and I don't blame him."

He walked to his desk, picked up his telephone, and, in a restrained voice, said: "Send Pickert up here. I'm in my office. Tell him there's something doing."

Lady Barbara rose from her chair and stood waiting. She did not know who Pickert was nor whether her pleading had moved Mangan, who had now resumed his seat at the desk, piled high with papers, one of which he was studying closely.

"And you don't think it will do any good if you come to my room?"

Mangan shook his head.

"And shall I wait any longer?" she continued. The words were barely audible. She knew her dismissal had come and that she must face another dreary hunt for new work.

Mangan did not raise his head. "Sit down. I'll tell you when I'm through."

The door opened and a thick-set man, in a brown suit and derby hat, stepped in.

Mangan wheeled his chair and fronted the two. "This woman, Pickert, is carried on our pay-roll as Mrs. Stanton. She's got a room off St. Mark's Place. Here's the number. About a week ago I gave her a lace mantilla to fix, something good—worth over $200—and every day she's been coming here with a new lie. Now she says she's lost it. She's either got it down where she lives or she's pawned it. I've done what I could to save her, but she sticks to it. Better take some one from the office, down-stairs, with you. Maybe when she thinks it over she'll come to her senses. Take her along with you. I'm through."

As the man stepped forward, Lady Barbara sprang away from his touch. "You do not mean you are going to let this man take me—Mr. Mangan, you must not, you shall not! You would not commit that outrage. Do you mean——?"

Pickert made a gesture of disgust, his fingers outspread. "Keep all that for the captain. It won't cut any ice here, and you'd better not talk. Now come along, and don't make any fuss. If it's a mistake, you can clear it up at the station-house. I ain't going to touch you. You keep ahead until you get to the street-door. I'll be right behind, and meet you on the sidewalk."

Lady Barbara drew herself up proudly. "I won't allow it!" she cried; "what I told you——"

Pickert swaggered closer. "Drop that, will you?

I got my orders. You heard 'em, didn't you? Will you go easy, or shall I have to—" and he half dragged a pair of handcuffs from his side pocket. "Now, you do just as I tell you; it'll all come right, and there won't nobody know what's goin' on. You get to hollerin' and mussin' up things and there'll be trouble, see? Open that door now, and walk out just as if everything was reg'lar."

CHAPTER XX

The routine of Felix's daily life had been broken this morning by the receipt of a letter. The postman had handed it to him as he crossed the street from Kitty's to Kling's, the tramp who was sweeping the sidewalk having pointed him out.

"That's him," cried the tramp. "That's Mr. O'Day. Catch him before he gets inside his place, or you'll lose him. Here, I'll take it."

"You'll take nothin'. Get out of my way."

"For me?" asked Felix, coloring slightly as the postman accosted him.

"Yes, if you're Mr. O'Day."

"I'm afraid I am. Thank you. If you have any others, bring them here to Mr. Kling's, where I can always be found during the day."

He glanced at the seal and the address, but kept it in his hands until he reached Kling's counter, where he settled into a chair, and with the greatest care slit the envelope with his knife. A year had passed since he had received a letter, nor had he expected any.

He read it through to the end, turning the pages again, rereading certain passages, his face giving no hint of the contents, folded the sheets, put them back in the envelope, and slid the whole into his inside pocket. After a little he rose, stood for a moment

watching Fudge, who, now that Masie had gone to school, had taken up his customary place in the window, his nose pressed against the pane. Then, as if some sudden resolve had seized him, he walked quickly to the rear of the store in search of his employer.

Otto was poring over his books, his bald head glistening under the rays of the gas-jet, which he had lighted to assist him in his work, the morning being dark.

"I have been wanting to talk to you for some time, Mr. Kling, about Masie," he began abruptly. "I may be going home to England, perhaps for a few weeks, perhaps longer, and I should like to take her with me. I have a sister who would look after her, and the trip would do her a world of good. I have been wanting to do this for a long time, but I am a little freer now to carry out the plan I had for her. And so I have come to propose it to you."

Otto listened gravely, his fat features frozen into calm. This clerk of his had made him many startling propositions, and every surrender had brought him profit. But turning over Beesving to him meant something so different that the father in him stood aghast. Yet his old habit of deference did not desert him when at last he spoke:

"Vell, vat vill I do? You know I don't got notin' but Beesving. Don't she get everytin' vere she is? I do all de schoolin' and de clothes and Aunty Gossburger look after her. Vhen she gets older maybe perhaps she vould like a trip. And den maybe ve

both go and leave you here to mind de shop in de summer-time. But now she's notin' but jus' Beesving, vid her head full of skippin' aroun'. No, I don't tink I can do dat for you. I do most anytin' for you, but my little girl, you see, dat come pretty close. Dat make a awful hole in me if Beesving go avay. No, you mustn't ask me dot."

"Not if it were for her good?"

"Yes, vell, of course, but how do I know dot? And vot you vant to go avay for? Dot's more vorse as Beesving. Ain't I pay you enough? Maybe you vants a little interest in de business? I vas tinkin' about dat only yesterday. Ve vill talk about dot sometimes."

Felix laughed gently.

"No, I don't wish any interest in the business. You pay me quite enough for the work I do, and I am quite willing to continue to serve you as long as I can. But Masie should not be brought up in these surroundings much longer. Perhaps you would be willing to send her to a good school away from here, if I could arrange it. Either here or in England."

Otto threw up his hands; he was becoming indignant, his mind more and more set against Felix's proposition.

"Vell, but vat's de matter vid de school she has now? She is more dan on de top of all de classes. De superintendent told me so ven he vas in here last veek buying Christmas presents. I sold him dat old chair you got Hans to put a new leg on. You remember dot chair. Vell, dat vas better as a new von vhen Hans got

trough. Hadn't been for you, dot old chair vould be kicking around now, and I vouldn't have de fifteen dollars he paid me for it. I vish sometimes you look around for more chairs like dot."

Felix nodded in assent, reading the Dutchman's obstinate mind in the shopkeeper's sudden return to business questions. If Masie's future was to be helped, another hand than his own must be stretched out. He turned on his heel, and was about to regain his chair, when Otto, craning his head, called out:

"Dot's Father Cruse comin' in. You ask him now vonce about dis goin' avay bizness. He tell you same as me."

The priest was now abreast of Felix, who had stepped forward to greet him, Otto watching their movements. The two stood talking in a low voice, Felix's eyes downcast as if in deep thought, the priest apparently urging some plan, which O'Day, by his manner, seemed to favor. They were too far off, and spoke too low, for Otto to catch the drift of the talk, and it was only when Felix, who had followed the priest outside the door, had returned that he called, from his high seat under the gas-jet: "Vell, vat did Father Cruse say?"

Felix drew his brows together. "Say about what?" he asked, as if the question had surprised him.

"About Beesving. Didn't you ask him?"

"No, we talked of other things," replied Felix and, turning on his heel, occupied himself about the shop.

Across the street meanwhile Kitty's own plans had

also gone astray this winter's morning—so many of them, in fact, that she was at her wits' end which way to turn. A trunk had been left at the wrong address, and John had been two hours looking for it. Bobby had come home from school with a lump on his head as big as a hen's egg, where some "gas-house kid," as Bobby expressed it, "had fetched him a crack." Mike, on his way down from the Grand Central, knowing that John was away with the other horse and Kitty worrying, had urged big Jim to gallop, and, in his haste, had bowled over a ten-year-old boy astride of a bicycle, and, worse yet, the entire outfit —big Jim, wagon, Mike, boy, bicycle, and the boy's father—were at that precise moment lined up in front of the captain's desk at the 35th Street police station.

The arrest did not trouble Kitty. She knew the captain and the captain knew her. If bail were needed, there were half a dozen men within fifty yards of where she stood who would gladly furnish it. Mike was careless, anyhow, and a little overhauling would do him good.

What did trouble her was the tying up of big Jim and her wagon at a time when she needed them most. Nobody knew when John would be back, and there was the stuff piling up, and not a soul to handle it. She stood, leaning over her short counter, trying to decide what to do first. She could not ask Felix to help her. He was tired out with the holiday sales. Nor was there anybody else on whom she could put her hands. It was Porterfield's busy time, and Cod-

man had all he could jump to. No, she could not ask them. Here she stepped out on the sidewalk to get a broader view of the situation, her mind intent on solving the problem.

At that same instant she saw Kling's door swing wide and Father Cruse step out, Felix beside him. The two shook each other's hands in parting, Felix going back into the shop, and Father Cruse taking the short-cut across the street to where Kitty stood—an invariable custom of his whenever he found himself in her neighborhood.

Instantly her anxiety vanished. "Look at it!" she cried enthusiastically. "Can you beat it? There he comes. God must 'a' sent him!" Then, as she ran to meet him: "Oh, Father, but it's better than a pair o' sore eyes to see ye! I'm all balled up wi' trouble. John's huntin' a lost trunk. Bobby's up-stairs with a slab o' raw beef on his head. Mike's locked up for runnin' over a boy. And my big Jim and my wagon is tied up outside the station, till it's all straightened out. Will ye help me?"

"I am on my way now to the police station," said the priest in his kindest voice.

"Oh, then, ye heard o' Mike?"

"Not a word. But I often drop in there of a morning. Many of the night arrests need counsel outside the law, and sometimes I can be of service. Is the boy badly hurt?"

"No, he hollered too loud when the wheel struck him, so they tell me. He's not half as bad as Bobby,

I warrant, who hasn't let a squeak out o' him. Will ye please put in a word for me, Father? I can't leave here or I'd go meself. I don't care if the captain holds on to Mike for a while, so he lets me have big Jim and the wagon. John will be up to go bail as soon as he gets back, if the captain wants it, which he won't, when he finds out who Mike is. Oh, that's a good soul! I knew ye'd help me. An' how did ye find Mr. Felix?"—a new anxiety now filling her mind.

The priest's face clouded. "Oh, very well; he spent last evening with me."

"Oh, that was it, was it? An' were ye trampin' the streets with him, too? It was pretty nigh daylight when he come in. I always know, for he wakes me when he shuts his door."

The priest, evidently absorbed in some strain of thought, parried her question with another: "And so the boy was not badly hurt? Well, that is something to be thankful for. Perhaps I may know his people. I will send Mike and the wagon back to you, if I can. Good-by." And he touched his hat, passing up the street with his long, even stride, the skirt of his black cassock clinging to his knees.

The arrest, so far as could be seen from Mike's general deportment, had not troubled that gentleman in the least. He had nodded pleasantly to the captain, who, in return, had frowned severely at him while the father of the boy was making the complaint; had winked good-naturedly at him the moment the accuser

had left the room; had asked after Kitty and John, motioned to him to stay around until somebody put in an appearance to go bail, and had then busied himself with more important matters. A thick-set man, in a brown suit and derby hat, accompanied by an officer and another man, had brought in a frail woman, looking as if life were slowly ebbing out of her; and the four were in a row before his desk. The usual questions were asked and answered by the detective and the clerk—the nature of the charge, the name and address of the party robbed, the name and address of the accused—and the entries properly made.

During the hearing, the frail woman had stood with bent head, dazed and benumbed. When her name was asked, she had made no answer nor did she give her residence. "I am an Englishwoman," was all she had said.

Mike, now privileged to enjoy the freedom of the room, had been watching the proceedings with increasing interest, so much so that he had edged up to the group, as close as he dared, where he could get the light full on the woman. When the words, "I am an Englishwoman," fell from her lips, he let out an oath, and slapped his thigh with the flat of his hand. "Of course it is! I thought I know'd her when she come in. English, is she? What a lot o' lies they do be puttin' up. She never saw England. She's a dago from 'cross town. Won't Mrs. Cleary's eyes pop when I tell her!"

The group in front of the captain's desk disintegrated.

The woman, still silent, was led away to the cell. Rosenthal's clerk, who had made the charge for the firm, had come round to the captain's side of the desk to sign some papers. Pickert and the officer had already disappeared through the street-door. At this juncture the priest entered. His presence was noted by every man in the room, most of whom rose to their feet, some removing their hats.

"Good-morning, captain," he said, including with his bow the other people present. "I have just left Mrs. Cleary, who tells me that one of her men is in trouble. Ah! I see him now. Is there anything that I can do for him?"

"Nothing, your reverence; the boy's not much hurt. I don't think it was Mike's fault, from the testimony, but it's a case of bail, all right."

"I am afraid, captain, she is not worrying so much about our poor Mike here as she is about the horse and wagon. These she needs, for Mr. Cleary is away, and there is no one to help her. Perhaps you would be good enough to send an officer with Mike, and let them drive back to her?"

"I guess that won't be necessary, your reverence. See here, Mike, get into your wagon and take it back to the stable, and bring somebody with you to go bail. We didn't want the wagon, only there was no place to leave it, and we knew they would send up for it sooner or later. It's outside now."

"Thank you, captain. And now, Mike, be very sure you come back," exclaimed the priest, with an

admonishing finger; "do you hear?" He always liked the Irishman.

Mike grinned the width of his face, caught up his cap, and made for the door. The priest watched him until he had cleared the room, then, leaning over the desk, asked: "Anything for me this morning, captain?"

"No, your reverence, not that I can see. Two drunks come in with the first batch, and a couple of crooks who had been working the 'elevated'; and a woman, a shoplifter. Got away with a piece of lace—a mantilla, they called it, whatever that is. She's just gone down to wait for the four o'clock delivery. It's a case of grand larceny. They say the lace is worth $250. Wasn't that about it?"

Rosenthal's man bobbed his head. He had not lifted his hat to the priest, and seemed to regard him with suspicion.

"What sort of a looking woman is she?" continued the priest.

"Oh, the same old kind; they're all alike. Nothing to say—too smart for that. I guess she stole it, all right. All I could get out of her was that she was an Englishwoman, but she didn't look it."

The priest lowered his head, an expression of suddenly awakened interest on his face. "May I see her?" he asked, in an eager tone.

"Why, sure! Bunky, take Father Cruse down. He wants to talk to that Englishwoman."

To most unfortunates, whether innocent or guilty, the row of polished steel bars which open and close

upon those in the grip of the law, are poised rifles awaiting the order to fire. To a woman like Lady Barbara, these guarded a dark and loathsome tomb, in which her last hope lay buried. That she had not deserved the punishment meted out to her did not soothe her agony. She had deserved none of Dalton's cruelty, and yet she had withered under its lash. This was the end; beyond, lay only a slow, lingering death, with her torture increasing as the hours crept on.

The sound of the turnkey's hand on the lock roused her to consciousness.

"Bring her outside where I can talk to her," said Father Cruse, pointing to a bench in the corridor.

She followed the guard mechanically, as a whipped spaniel follows its master, her steps dragging, her body trembling, her head bowed as if awaiting some new humiliation. She had no strength to resist. Something in the priest's quiet, in the way he trod beside her, seemed to have reassured her, for as she sank on the bench beside him, she leaned over, laid one hand on his sleeve, and asked feebly: "Are they going to let me go?"

"That I cannot say, my good woman; I can only hope so." He looked toward the guard. "Better leave us for a while, Bunky." The turnkey touched his cap and mounted the narrow iron steps to the room above.

Father Cruse waited until the footsteps had ceased to echo in the corridor, and then turned to Lady Barbara. "And now tell me something about yourself;

have you no friends you can send for? I will see they get your message. The captain told me you were English. Is this true?"

She had withdrawn her hand and now sat with averted face, the faint flicker of hope his presence had enkindled extinguished by his evasive answer. Only when he repeated the question did she reply, and then in a mere whisper, without lifting her head: "Yes, I am English."

"And your people, are they where you can reach them?"

She did not answer; there was nothing to be gained by yielding to his curiosity. Nor did she intend to reply to any more of his questions. He was only one of those kind priests who looked after the poor and whose sympathy, however well meant, would be of little value. If she told him how cruel had been the wrong done her, and how unjust had been her arrest, it would make no difference; he could not help her.

"There must be somebody," he urged. He had read her indecision in the nervous play of her fingers, as he had read many another human emotion in his time. "There must be somebody," he repeated.

"There is only Martha," she answered at last, yielding to his influence. "She was my nurse when I was a child. She is as poor as I am. She will come to me if you will send word to her. They would not listen to me at Rosenthal's when I begged them to bring her to the store." She lifted her head and stared wildly about her. "Oh, the injustice of it all—and

the awful horror of this place! How can men do such things? I told them the truth, Father, I told them the truth. I never stole it. How could I ever steal anything? How dared he speak to me as he did?"

She turned, straining her whole body as if in mortal anguish; then, with her shoulder against the hard, whitewashed wall, she broke at last into sobs.

The priest sat still, waiting and watching, as a surgeon does a patient slowly emerging from delirium.

"Men are seldom reasonable, my good woman, when they lose their property, and they often do things which they regret afterward. Of what were you accused?"

His tone reassured her, and, for the first time, she looked directly at him. "Of stealing a mantilla which I had taken to my rooms to repair."

"Whose was it?"

"Rosenthal's, for whom I worked."

"The large store near by here, on Third Avenue?"

"Yes."

Father Cruse lapsed once more into silence, absorbed in a study of certain salient points of her person—her way of sitting and of folding her hands, her thin, delicately modelled frame, the pallor of her oval face, with its mobile mouth, the singular whiteness of her teeth, and the blue of her eyes, shaded by the cheap, black-straw hat which hid her forehead. Then he glanced at her feet, one of which protruded from her coarse skirt—no larger than a child's.

When he spoke again, it was in a positive way,

as if his inspection had caused him to adopt a definite course which he would now follow. "This old nurse of yours, this woman you called Martha, does she know of any one who could get bail for you? You can only stay here for a few hours, and then they will take you to the Tombs, unless some one can go bail. I know the Rosenthals, and they would, I think, listen to any reasonable proposition."

"Would they let me go home, then?"

"Yes, until your trial came off."

She shuddered, hugging herself the closer. Her mind had not gone that far. It was the present horror that had confronted her, not a trial in court.

"Martha has a brother," she said at last, "who has a business of some kind, and who might help. If you will bring her to me, she can find him."

"You don't remember what his business is?" he continued.

"I think it is something to do with fitting out ships. He was once a mate on one of my father's vessels and——"

She stopped abruptly, frightened now at her own indiscretion. She had been wrong in wanting to send for Stephen, even in referring to him. Whatever befell her, she was determined that her people at home should not suffer further on her account.

Father Cruse had caught the look, and his heart gave a bound, though no gesture betrayed him. "You have not told me your name," he said simply—as if it were a matter of routine in cases like hers.

She glanced at him quickly. "Does it make any difference?"

"It might. I do not believe you are a criminal, but if I am to help you as I want to do, I must know the truth."

She thought for a moment. Here was something she could not escape. The assumed name had so far shielded her. She would brave it out as she had done before.

"They call me Mrs. Stanton."

"Is that your true name?"

The Carnavons were imperious, unforgiving, and sometimes brutal. Many of them had been roués, gamblers, and spendthrifts, but none of them had ever been a liar.

"No!" she answered firmly.

Father Cruse settled back in his seat. The ring of sincerity in the woman's "No" had removed his last doubt. "You do very wrong, my good woman, not to tell me the whole truth," he remarked, with some emphasis. "I am a priest, as you see, and attached to the Church of St. Barnabas—not far from here. I visit this station-house almost every morning, seeing what I can do to help people just like yourself. I will go to Rosenthal, and then I will find your old nurse, and I will try to have your case delayed until your nurse can get hold of her brother. But that is really all I can do until I have your entire confidence. I am convinced that you are a woman who has been well brought up, and that this is your first experience in a

place of this kind. I hope it will be the last; I hope, too, that the charge made against you will be proved false. But does not all this make you realize that you should be frank with me?"

She drew herself up with a certain dignity infinitely pathetic, yet in which, like the flavor of some old wine left in a drained glass, there lingered the aroma of her family traditions. "I am very grateful, sir, to you. I know you only want to be kind, but please do not ask me to tell you anything more. It would only make other people unhappy. There is no one but myself to blame for my poverty, and for all I have gone through. What is to become of me I do not know, but I cannot make my people suffer any more. Do not ask me."

"It might end their suffering," he replied quickly. "I have a case in point now where a man has been searching New York for months, hoping to get news of his wife, who left him nearly a year ago. He comes in to see me every few nights and we often tramp the streets together. My work takes me into places she would be apt to frequent, so he comes with me. He and I were up last night until quite late. He has nothing in his heart but pity for that poor woman, who he fears has been left stranded by the man she trusted. So far he has heard nothing of her. I left him hardly an hour ago. Now, there, you see, is a case where just a word of frankness and truth might have ended all their sufferings. I told Mr. O'Day this morning, when I left him, that——"

She had grown paler and paler during the long recital, her wide-open eyes staring into his, her bosom heaving with suppressed excitement, until at the mention of Felix's name, she staggered to her feet, and cried: "You know Felix O'Day?"

"Yes, thank God, I do, and you are his wife, Lady Barbara O'Day, Lord Carnavon's daughter."

She cowered like a trapped animal, uncertain which way to spring. In her agony she shrank against the wall, her arms outstretched. How did this man know all the secrets of her life? Then there arose a calming thought. He was a priest—a man who listened and did not betray. Perhaps, after all, he could help her. He wanted the truth. He should have it.

"Yes," she answered, her voice sinking. "I am Lord Carnavon's daughter."

"And Felix O'Day's wife?"

"And Felix O'Day's wife," came the echo, and, with the last word, her last vestige of strength seemed to leave her.

The priest rose to his full height. "I was sure of it when I first saw you," he said, a note of triumph in his voice. "And now, one last question. Are you guilty of this theft?"

"*Guilty!* I guilty! How could I be?" The denial came with a lift of the head, her eyes kindling, her bosom heaving.

"I believe you. There is not a moment to be lost." The priest and father confessor were gone now; it was the man of affairs who was speaking. "I will see

Rosenthal at once, and then send for your nurse. Give me her address."

When he had written it, he stepped to the foot of the stairs, and called to one of the guards. Then he slipped his hand under his cassock, drew out his watch, noted the hour, and in a firm voice—one intended to be obeyed—said:

"Go back into your cell and sit there until I come. Do not worry if I am away longer than I expect, and do not be frightened when the key is turned on you. It is best that you be locked up for a while. You should give thanks to God, my dear woman, that I have found you."

CHAPTER XXI

The news of Mike's arrest had been received by Kitty's neighbors with varying degrees of indifference. Everybody realized that, as the run-over boy had lost nothing but his breath—and but little of that, judging from his vigorous howl when Mike picked him up—nothing would come of the affair so long as the present captain ruled the precinct. Kitty and John and all who belonged to them were too popular around the station; too many of the boys had slipped in and slipped out of a cold night, warmed up by the contents of her coffee-pot.

Indeed, between the captain and the denizens of "The Avenue," only the most friendly, amicable, and delightful personal relations prevailed. To the habitual criminal, the sneak-thief, and the hold-up, he might be a mailed despot swinging a mailed fist, but to the occasional "Monday drunk," or the man who had had the best or the worst of it in a fight, or to one like Mike who was the victim of an unavoidable accident, he was only a heathen idol of justice behind which sat a big-waisted, tightly belted man whose wife and daughters everybody knew as he himself knew everybody in return; who belonged to the same lodge, played poker in the same up-stairs room when off duty, and

was as tender-hearted in time of trouble as any one of their other acquaintances. Not to have allowed Mike, a man he knew, a man who had been Kitty and John's driver for years, to hunt up his own bond, would have been as unwise and impossible as his releasing a burglar on straw bail, or a murderer because the dead man could not make a complaint.

When, therefore, Mike burst into the kitchen with the additional information that "the cap" had let him go to bring back the wagon and somebody with "cash" enough to go bail, a general movement, headed by Tim Kelsey, who happened to be passing at the time, was immediately organized—Tim to proceed at once to the station-house, take the captain on one side, and so end the matter. Locking up Mike, even threatening him, was, as the captain knew, an invasion of the rights of "The Avenue." Nobody within its confines had ever been entangled in the meshes of the law—simply because nobody had wanted to break it. It was the howling boy who should have been locked up for getting under Mike's wheels, or his father who ought to have kept his son off the street.

Mike listened impatiently to the discussion and, watching his chance, beckoned to Kitty, shut the door upon the two, and poured into her ear a full account of what he had seen and heard at the station-house.

"Well, what's that got to do with it?" Kitty demanded. "What did she have to do with the boy?"

"Nothing, don't I tell ye—she's been swipin' a department store, and they got her dead to rights."

"Who's been swipin'? What are ye talkin' about, Mike? Stop it now—I've got a lot to do, and——"

"The woman ye put to bed that night. The one ye picked up near St. Barnabas, and brought in here and dried her off. She skipped in the mornin' without sayin' 'thank ye'—why, ye must remember her! She was——"

Kitty clapped her two palms to her face, framing her bulging eyes—a favorite gesture when she was taken completely by surprise.

"That woman!" she cried, staring at Mike. "Where is she now? Tell me——"

"I don't know—but she——"

"Ye don't know, and ye come down here with this yarn? Don't ye try and fool me, Mike, or I'll break every bone in yer skin. Go on, now! How do ye know it's the same woman?"

"I'm tellin' ye no lies. Come back with me and see for yerself. The cap will let ye go down and talk to her. I heard Father Cruse tell ye to keep an eye out for her if she ever came around here agin. Ye got to hurry or they'll have her in the Black Maria on the way to the Tombs. Bunky told me so."

Kitty stood in deep meditation. She remembered that Mike had been in the kitchen when the woman sat by the stove. She remembered, too, that Father Cruse had cautioned her to send word to the rectory if the poor creature came again and, if there were not time to reach him, then to tell Mr. O'Day. That the priest had not run across the woman at the station-

house was evident, or he would have sent word by Mike. She would herself find out and then act.

"But ye must have seen Father Cruse. Did he send any word?"

"Yes, he come in just as I was leavin'. It was him who told me to be sure to hurry back. See the horse gits some water, will ye? I got to go back."

"Hold on—what did the Father say about the woman?"

"Nothin', don't I tell ye?—he didn't see her. They'd locked her up before he came."

"Why didn't ye tell him who it was?"

"How was I a-goin' to tell him when the cap told me to git?"

"Go on, then, wid ye! If the Father's still there, tell him I'm a-comin' up, and will bring Mr. O'Day wid me, and to hold on till I get there."

She took her wraps from a peg behind the door, threw it wide, and joined her neighbors in the office, composing her face as best she could.

"I've got to go over to Otto Kling's," she announced bluntly, without any attempt at apologies. "Some one of ye must go up and bail Mike out—any one of ye will do. Mr. Kelsey spoke first, so maybe he'd better go. I'd go myself and sign the bond only I'm no good, for I don't own a blessed thing in the world, except the shoes I stand in—and they're half-soled and not paid for; John's got the rest. I'll be there later on, ye can tell the captain. Mr. Codman, please send over one of your boys to mind my place. John ain't turned

up and won't for an hour. That trunk went to Astoria instead of the Astor House, bad 'cess to it, and that's about as far apart as it could git. And, Mike, don't stand there with yer tongue out! And don't let Toodles go with ye. Get back as quick as ye can—and tell the captain to make it easy for me, that if the boy's badly hurt I'll go and nurse him if he ain't got anybody to take care of him. Git out, ye varmint—thank ye, Tim Kelsey, I'll do as much for you next time ye have to go to jail. Good-by"—and she kept on to Kling's.

Otto's store was full of customers when Kitty strode in. Even little Masie had been pressed into service to help on with the sales, as well as one of the "Dutchies" whom Kling had brought up from the cellar. The few remaining hours of the old year were fast disappearing and the crowd of buyers, intent on securing some small remembrance for those they loved, or more important gifts with which to welcome the New Year, thronged the store and upper floor.

Kitty made straight for Felix, who was leaning over the low counter, absorbed in the sale of some old silver. His disappointment over Kling's rebuff regarding Masie's future had been greatly lightened, relieved by his talk with Father Cruse an hour before, and he had again thrown himself into his work with a determination to make the last days of the year a success for his employer,—all the more necessary when he remembered his plans for the child. The customer, an important one, was trying to make up her

mind as to the choice between two pieces, and Felix was evidently intent on not hurrying her.

He had seen Kitty when she opened the door and approached the counter, had noticed her excitement when she stopped in front of him, and knew that something out of the ordinary had sent her to him at this, the busiest part of his own and her day. But his only sign of recognition was the lift of an eyelid and a slight movement of his hand, the palm turned toward her, a gesture which told as plainly as could be that, while he was glad to see her—something she was never in doubt of—the present moment was ill adapted to protracted conversation.

Kitty, however, was not built on diplomatic lines. What she wanted she wanted at once. When she had something vital to accomplish she went straight at it, and certainly nothing more vital than her present mission had come her way for weeks.

That the news she carried had something to do with O'Day's happiness, she was convinced, or Father Cruse would not have been so insistent. That the woman herself was, in some way, connected with his misfortunes, she also suspected—and had done so, in reality, ever since the night on which she gave him the sleeve-links. She had not said so to John; she had not hinted as much to Father Cruse; but she had never dismissed the possibility from her mind.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," she said, ignoring Felix and going straight to the cause of the embargo, "but couldn't ye let me have Mr. O'Day for a few minutes? I've somethin' very partic'lar to say to him."

"Why, Mistress Kitty—" began Felix, smiling at her audacity, the customer also regarding her with amused curiosity.

"Yes, Mr. O'Day, I wouldn't butt in if I could help it. Excuse me, ma'am, but there's Otto just got loose, and—Otto, come over here and take care of this lady who is goin' to let me have Mr. O'Day for half an hour. Thank ye, ma'am, you don't know me, but I'm Kitty Cleary, the expressman's wife, from across the street, and I'm always mixin' in where I don't belong and I know ye'll forgive me. Otto'll charge ye twice the price Mr. O'Day would, but he can't help it because he's Dutch. Oh, Otto, I know ye!"

Felix laughed outright. "Thank you, Mr. Kling," he said, yielding his place to his employer, "and if you will excuse me, madam," and he bowed to his customer, "I will see what it is all about—and now, Mistress Kitty, what can I do for you?"

Kitty backed away toward the door, so that a huge wardrobe shielded her from Otto and his customer.

"Come near, Mr. O'Day," she whispered, all her forced humor gone. "I've got the woman who dropped the sleeve-buttons."

Felix swayed unsteadily, and gripped a chair-back for support.

"You've got—the woman— What do you mean?" he said at last.

"Mike saw her at the police-station. They've put her in a cell."

"Arrested?"

"Yes, for stealin'."

Involuntarily his fingers brushed his throat as if he were choking, but no words came. He had been all his life accustomed to surprises, some of them appalling, but against this, for the instant, he had no power to stand.

Kitty stood watching the quivering of his lips and the drawn, strained muscles about his jaw and neck as his will power whipped them back to their normal shape. She was convinced now of the truth of her suspicions—the woman was not only interwoven with his past, but was closely identified with his present anguish.

She drew closer, her voice rising. "Ye'll go with me, won't ye, Mr. Felix?" she went on, hiding under an assumed indifference all recognition of his struggle. "Father Cruse told me if I ever come across her again, and there wasn't time to get hold of him, to let ye know."

"I will go anywhere, where Father Cruse thinks I should, Mrs. Cleary—especially in cases of this kind, where I may be of use." The words had come from between partly closed lips; his hands were still tightly clinched. "And you say she was arrested—for stealing?"

"Yes, shopliftin', they call it. Poor creatures, they get that miserable and trodden on they don't know right from wrong!"

Then, as if to give him time in which to recover himself fully, she went on, speaking rapidly: "And,

after all, it may only be a put-up job or a mistake. Half the women they pinch in them big stores ain't reg'lar thieves. They get tempted, or they can't find anybody to tell 'em the price o' things, especially these holiday times, and they carry 'em round from counter to counter, and along comes a store detective and nabs 'em with the goods on 'em. They did that to me once, over at Cryder's, and I told him I'd knock him down if he put his hand on me, and somebody come along who knew me, and they was that scared when they found out who I was that they bowed and scraped like dancin' masters and wanted me to take the skirt along if I'd say nothin' about it. That might have happened to this poor child——"

"Has Father Cruse seen her?" asked Felix. No word of the recital had reached his ears.

"No—that's why I come to ye."

"And where did you say she was?" He had himself under perfect control again, and might have been a man bent only on aiding Father Cruse in some charitable work.

"Locked up in the station-house not far from here. It won't take ye ten minutes to get there."

Felix glanced at the big-faced clock, facing the side window of the store.

"Yes, of course I will go, since Father Cruse wishes it. Thank you for bringing his message. You need not wait."

"Needn't wait! Ye're not goin' one step without me. They'd chuck ye out if ye did, and that's what

they won't do to me if the captain's in his office. Besides, Mike run over a boy, and Tim Kelsey is up there now standin' bail for him. There's no use goin' unless ye see her. That's what the Father wanted ye to do, and that ain't easy unless ye've got the run of the station. So, ye see, I got to go with ye whether ye want me or not, or ye won't get nowheres. I'll wait till ye get yer hat and coat."

All the way to the station-house, Kitty beside him, Felix was putting into silent words the thoughts that raced through his mind.

"Barbara arrested as a vulgar thief!" he kept saying over and over. "A woman brought up a lady—with the best blood of England in her veins—her father a man of distinction! The woman I married!"

Then, as a jagged thread of light breaks away from a centre bolt, illuminating a distant cloud, a faint ray cheered him. Perhaps the woman was not Barbara. No one had any proof. Father Cruse had never believed it, and he had only argued himself into thinking that the woman who had dropped the sleeve-link must be his wife. Until he knew definitely, saw her with his own eyes, neither would *he* believe it, and a certain shame of his own suspicion swept through him like a flame.

The captain was out when the two reached the station. Nor was there any one who knew Kitty except a departing patrolman, who nodded to her pleasantly as she passed in, adding in a whisper the information that Mike and Kelsey had gone up to

Magistrate Cassidy, who held court in the next block, and that she was "not to worry," as it was "all right."

A new appointee—a lieutenant she had never seen before—was temporarily in charge of the station.

"I'm Mrs. Cleary," she began, in her free, outspoken way, "and this is Mr. Felix O'Day."

The new appointee stared and said nothing.

"Ye never saw me before, but that wouldn't make any difference if the captain was around. But ye can find out about me from any one of yer men who knows me. I'm here with Mr. O'Day lookin' up a woman who was brought here this morning for stealin' some finery or whatever it was from one of these big stores—and we want to see her, if ye plaze."

The lieutenant shook his head. "Can't see no prisoner without the captain's orders."

Kitty bridled, but she kept her temper. "When will he be back?"

"Six o'clock. He's gone to headquarters."

"He'd let me see her if he was here," she retorted, with some asperity.

"No doubt—but I can't." All this time he had not changed his position—his arms on the desk, his fingers drumming idly.

Felix rested his hands on the rail fronting the desk. "May I ask if you saw the woman?"

"No. I only came on half an hour ago."

"Is there any one here who did see her?"

Something in O'Day's manner and in the incisive

tones of his voice, those of command not supplication, made the lieutenant change his position. The speaker might have a "pull" somewhere. He turned to the sergeant. "You were on duty. What did she look like?"

The sergeant yawned from behind his hand. He had been up most of the previous night and was some hours behind his sleep schedule. Kitty's presence had not roused him but the self-possessed man could not be ignored.

"You mean the girl who got Rosenthal's lace?" he answered.

"You're dead right," returned the lieutenant obligingly. He had, of course, always been ready to do what he could for people in trouble, and was so now.

"Oh, about as they all look." This time the sergeant directed his remarks to Felix. "We get two or three of 'em every day, specially about Christmas and New Year's. Rather run down at the heel, this one, and —no, come to think of it, I'm wrong—she looked different. Been a corker in her time—not bad now—about thirty, I guess—maybe younger—you can't always tell. Rather slim—had on a black-straw hat and some kind of a cloak."

Kitty was about to freshen his memory with some remembrance of her own, and had got as far as, "Well, my man Mike was here and he told me that—" when Felix lifted a restraining hand, supplementing her outburst by the direct question: "Did she say nothing about herself?"

"She did not. All we could get out of her was that she was English."

Felix bent nearer. "Will you please describe her a little closer? I have a reason for knowing."

The sergeant caught the look of determination, dallied with a tin paper-cutter, bent his head on one side, and pursed a pair of thick lips. It was a strain on his memory, this recalling the features of one of a dozen prisoners, but somehow he dared not refuse.

"Well, she was one of the pocket kind of women, small and well put up but light built, you know. She had blue eyes—big ones—I noticed 'em partic'lar—and about the smallest pair of feet I ever seen on a girl. She stumbled down-stairs and caught her dress, and I remember they was about as big as a kid's. That was another thing set me to wondering how she got into a scrape like this. She could have done a lot better if she had a-wanted to," this last came with a leer.

Felix clenched his teeth, and drove his nails into the palms of his hands. He would have throttled the man had he dared.

"Did she make any defense?" he asked, when he had himself under control again.

"No—there warn't no use—she owned up to having pinched it. Not here at the desk, but to Rosenthal's man who made the charge—that is, she didn't deny it. The stuff was worth $250. That's a felony, you know."

Kitty saw Felix sway for an instant, and was about

to put out a protecting hand when he turned again to the lieutenant.

"Officer, I do not ask you to break your rules, but I would consider it an especial favor if you would let me see this woman for a moment—even if you do not permit me to speak to her."

"Well, you can't see her." The reply came with some positiveness and a slight touch of irony. He had made up his mind now that if the speaker had a pull, he would meet it by keeping strictly to the regulations.

"Why not?"

"Because she ain't here. She's in the Tombs by this time, unless somebody went her bail up at court. They had her in the patrol-wagon as I come on duty."

"The Tombs? That is the city prison, is it not?" Felix asked, hardly conscious of his own question, absorbed only in one thought—Lady Barbara's degradation.

"That's what it is," answered the lieutenant with a contemptuous glance at Felix, followed by a curl of the lip. No man had a pull who asked a question like that.

"If I went there, could I see her?"

"When?"

"This afternoon."

"Nothin' doin'—too late. You might work it to-morrow. Step down to headquarters, they'll tell you. If she's up for felony it means five years and them kind ain't easy to see. Can I do anything more for you?"

"No," said Felix firmly.

"Well, then, move on, both of you—you can't block up the desk."

Felix turned and left the station-house, Kitty following in silence, her heart torn for the man beside her. Never had he seemed finer to her than at this moment; never had her own heart stirred with greater loyalty. But never since she had known him had she seen him so shaken.

"There is nothing more we can do to-day," he said, speaking evenly, almost coldly, when they reached the corner of the street. "I will see Father Cruse to-night and tell him of your kindness, and he can decide as to what is to be done. And if you do not mind, I will leave you."

She stood and watched him as he disappeared in the throng. She understood her dismissal and was not offended. It was not her secret and she had no right to interfere or even to advise. When he was ready he would tell her. Until that time she would wait with her hands held out.

Felix crossed the street, halted for an instant as if uncertain as to his course, and turned toward the river. He wanted to be alone, and the crowd gave him a greater sense of isolation. It was the first time in months that he had tramped the thoroughfares without some definite object in view. All that was now a thing of the past, never to be revived. His quest was finished. The interview with the sergeant had ended it all. Every item in his detailed account of the woman now in the Tombs tallied with Kitty's

description of the woman with the sleeve-buttons and so on, in turn, with the woman who was once his wife.

With this knowledge there flamed up in his heart an uncontrollable anger, fanned to white heat by hatred of the man who had caused it all. His fingers tightened and his teeth ground together. That reckoning, he said to himself, would come later, once he got his hands on him. If she were a thief, Dalton had made her so. If she were an outcast and a *menace* to society, Dalton had done it. By what hellish process, he could not divine, knowing Lady Barbara as he did, but the fact was undeniable.

What then was he to do? Go back to London and leave her, or stay here and fight on in the effort to save her? *Save her!* Who could save her? She had stolen the goods; been arrested with them in her possession; was in the Tombs; and, in a few weeks, would be lost to the world for a term of years.

He could even now see the vulgar, leering crowd; watch the jury, picked from the streets, file in and take their seats; hear the few, curt, routine words, cold as bullets, drop from the lips of the callous judge, the frail, desolate woman deserted by every soul, paying the price without murmur or protest—glad that the end had come.

And then, with one of those tricks that memory sometimes plays, he saw the altar-rail, where he had stood beside her—she in her bridal robes, her soft blue eyes turned toward his; he heard again the responses, "for better or for worse"—"until death do us part,"

caught the scent of flowers and the peal of the organ as they turned and walked down the aisle, past the throng of richly dressed guests.

"Great God!" he choked, worming his way through the crowd, unconscious of his course, unmindful of his steps, oblivious to passers-by—alone with an agony that scorched his very soul.

CHAPTER XXII

When Martha, on her return from Stephen's, had climbed the dimly lighted stairs leading to her apartment, she ran against a thick-set man, in brown clothes and derby hat, seated on the top step. He had interviewed the faded old wreck who served as janitress and, learning that Mrs. Munger would be back any minute, had taken this method of being within touching distance when the good woman unlocked her door. She might decide to leave him outside its panels while she got in her fine work of hiding the thing he had climbed up three flights of stairs to find. In that case, a twist of his foot between the door and the jamb would block the game.

"Are you the man who has been waiting for me?" she exclaimed, as the detective's big frame became discernible under the faint rays from the "Paul Pry" skylight.

"Yes, if you are the woman who is living with Mrs. Stanton." He had risen to his feet and had moved toward the door.

"I'm Mrs. Munger, if that's who you are looking for, and we live together. She's not back yet, so the woman down-stairs has just told me. Are you from Rosenthal's?"

"I am." He had edged nearer, his fingers within

reach of the knob, his lids narrowing as he studied her face and movements.

"Did they find the lace—the mantilla?"

"Not as I heard," he answered, noting her anxiety. "That's what brought me down. I thought maybe you might know something about it."

"Didn't find it?" she sighed. "No, I knew they wouldn't. She was sure she had taken it up night before last, but I knew she hadn't. Where's my key?—Oh, yes—stand back and get out of my light so I can find the keyhole. It's dark enough as it is. That's right. Now come inside. You can wait for her better in here than out on these steps. Look, will you! There's her coffee just as she left it. She hasn't had a crumb to eat to-day. What do you want to see her about? The rest of the work? It's in the box there."

Pickert, with a swift, comprehensive glance, summed up the apartment and its contents: the little table by the window with Lady Barbara's work-basket; the small stove, and pine table set out with the breakfast things; the cheap chairs; the dresser with its array of china, and the two bedrooms opening out of the modest interior. Its cleanliness and order impressed him; so did Martha's unexpected frankness. If she knew anything of the theft, she was an adept at putting up a bluff.

"When do you expect Mrs. Stanton back?" he began, in an offhand way, stretching his shoulders as if the long wait on the stairs had stiffened his joints. "That's her name, ain't it?"

"I expected to find her here," she answered, ignoring his inquiry as to Lady Barbara's identity. "They are keeping her, no doubt, on some new work. She hasn't had any breakfast, and now it's long past lunch-time. And they didn't find the piece of lace? That's bad! Poor dear, she was near crazy when she found it was gone!"

Pickert had missed no one of the different expressions of anxiety and tenderness that had crossed her placid face. "No—it hadn't turned up when I left," he replied; adding, with another stretch, quite as a matter of course, "she had it all right, didn't she?"

"Had it! Why, she's been nearly a week on it. I helped her all I could, but her eyes gave out."

"Then you would know it again if you saw it?" The stretch was cut short this time.

"Of course I'd know it—don't I tell you I helped her fix it?"

The detective turned suddenly and, with a thrust of his chin, rasped out: "And if one, or both of you, pawned it somewhere round here, you could remember that, too, couldn't you?"

Martha drew back, her gentle eyes flashing: "Pawned it! What do you mean?"

The detective lunged toward her. "Just what I say. Now don't get on your ear, Mrs. Munger." He was the thorough bully now. "It won't cut any ice with me or with Mr. Mangan. It didn't this morning or he wouldn't have sent me down here. We want that mantilla and we got to have it. If we don't there'll

be trouble. If you know anything about it, now's the time to say so. The woman you call Mrs. Stanton got all balled up this morning, and couldn't say what she did with it. They all do that—we get half a dozen of 'em every week. She's pawned it all right—what I want to know is *where*. Rosenthal's in a hole if we don't get it. If you've spent the money, I've got a roll right here." And he tapped his pocket. "No questions asked, remember! All I want is the mantilla, and if it don't come she'll be in the Tombs and you'll go with her. We mean business, and don't you forget it!"

Martha turned squarely upon him—was about to speak—changed her mind—and drawing up a chair, settled down upon it.

"You're a nice young man, you are!" she exclaimed, scornfully. "A very nice young man! And you think that poor child is a thief, do you? Do you know who she is and what she's suffered? If I could tell you, you'd never get over it, you'd be that ashamed!"

She was not afraid of him; her army hospital experience had thrown her with too many kinds of men. What filled her with alarm was his reference to Lady Barbara. But for this uncertainty, and the possible consequences of such a procedure, she would have thrown open her door and ordered him out as she had done Dalton. Then, seeing that Pickert still maintained his attitude—that of a setter-dog with the bird in the line of his nose—she added testily:

"Don't stand there staring at me. Take a chair

where I can talk to you better. You get on my nerves. It's pawned, is it? Yes. I believe you, and I know who pawned it. Dalton's got it—that's who. I thought so last night—now I'm sure of it." She was on her feet now, tearing at her bonnet-string as if to free her throat. "He sneaked it out of that box on the floor beside you, when she was hiding from him in her bedroom."

Pickert retreated slightly at this new development; then asked sharply: "Dalton! Who's Dalton?"

"The meanest cur that ever walked the earth—that's who he is. He's almost killed my poor lady, and now she must go to jail to please him. Not if I'm alive, she won't. He stole that mantilla! I'm just as sure of it as I am that my name is Martha Munger!"

Pickert's high tension relaxed. If this new clew had to be followed it could best be followed with the aid of this woman, who evidently hated the man she denounced. She would be of assistance, too, in identifying both the lace and the thief—and he had seen neither the one nor the other as yet. So it was the same old game, was it?—with a man at the bottom of the deal!

"Do you know the pawn-shops around here?" he asked, becoming suddenly confidential.

"Not one of them, and don't want to," came the contemptuous reply. "When I get as low down as that, I've got a brother to help me. He'll be up here himself to-night and will tell you so."

Pickert had been standing over her throughout the

interview, despite her invitation to be seated. He now moved toward a seat, his hat still tilted back from his forehead.

"What makes you think this man you call Dalton stole it?" he asked, drawing a chair out from the table, as though he meant to let her lead him on a new scent.

"Come over here before you sit down and I'll tell you," she exclaimed, peremptorily. "Now take a look at that box. Now watch me lift the lid, and see what you find," and she enacted the little pantomime of the morning.

The detective stroked his chin with his forefinger. He was more interested in Martha's talk about Dalton than he was in the contents of the box. "And you want to get him, don't you?" he asked slyly.

"Me get him! I wouldn't touch him with a pair of tongs. What I want is for him to keep out of here—I told him that last night."

"Well, then, tell me what he looks like, so I can get him."

"Like anybody else until you catch the hang-dog droop in his eyes, as if he was afraid people would ask him some question he couldn't answer."

"One of the slick kind?"

"Yes, for he's been a gentleman—before he got down to be a dog."

"How old?"

"About thirty—maybe thirty two or three. You can't tell to look at him, he's that battered."

"Smooth-shaven—well-dressed?"

"Yes—no beard nor mustache on him. I couldn't see his clothes. His big cape-coat, buttoned up to his chin, hid them and his face, too. He had a slouch-hat on his head with the brim pulled down when he went out."

"And you say he's been living off of Mrs. Stanton since——"

"No, I didn't say it. I said he was a cur and that she wouldn't go to jail to please him—that's what I said. Now, young man, if you're through, I am. I've got to get my work done."

Pickert tilted his hat to the other side of his bullet head, felt in his side pocket for a cigar, bit off the end, and spat the crumbs of tobacco from his lips.

"You could put me on to the mantilla, couldn't you?—spot it for me once I come across it?"

"Of course I could, the minute I clapped my eyes on it."

"It's a kind of lace shawl, ain't it?"

"Yes. All black—a big one with a frill around it and a tear in one side—that's what she was mending. A good piece, I should think, because it was so fine and silky. You could squash it up in one hand, it was that soft. That's why she took such care of it, putting it back in that box every night to keep the dust out of it."

"Well, what's the matter with your coming along with me?"

"And where are you going to take me?"

"To one or two pawn-shops around here."

"Well, I'm not going with you. If I go anywhere it will be up to Rosenthal's. I'm getting worried. It's after three o'clock now. She's got no money to get anything to eat. She'll come home dead beat out if she's been hungry all this time."

"Well, it's right on the way. We'll take in a few of the small shops, and then we'll keep on up. There are two on Second Avenue, and then there's Blobbs's, one of the biggest around here. The old woman gets a lot of that kind of stuff and she'll open up when she finds out who wants to know. I've done business with her—where does this fellow, Dalton, live?"

"Up on the East Side."

"Well, then, we are all right. He will make for some fence where he is not known. Come along."

Martha hesitated for an instant, abandoned her decision, and retied her bonnet-strings; she might find her mistress the quicker if she acceded to his request. She stepped to the stove, examined the fire to see that it was all right, added a shovel of coal and, with Pickert at her heels, groped her way down the dingy stairs, her fingers following the handrail. In the front hall she stopped to say to the janitress that she was going to Rosenthal's and to tell Mrs. Stanton, when she came, that she was not to leave the apartment again, as Mr. Carlin was coming to see her.

When they reached the corner of the next block, Pickert halted outside a small loan-office, told her to wait, and disappeared inside, only to emerge five minutes later and continue his walk with her up-town.

The performance was repeated twice, his last stop being in front of a gold sign notifying the indigent and the guilty that one Blobbs bought, sold, and exchanged various articles of wearing-apparel for cash or its equivalent.

Martha eyed the cluster of balls suspended above the door, and occupied herself with a cursory examination of the contents of the front window, to none of which, she said to herself, would she have given house-room had the choice of the whole collection been offered her. She was about to march into the shop and end the protracted interview when Pickert flung himself out.

"I'm on—got him down fine! Listen—see if I've got this right! He wore a black cape-coat buttoned up close—that's what you told me, wasn't it?—and a kind of a slouch-hat. Been an up-town swell before he got down and out? That kind of a man, ain't he? Smooth-shaven, with a droop in his eye—speaks like a foreigner—English. Somethin' doin'!—Do you know a man named Kling who keeps an old-furniture store up on Fourth Avenue?"

"No, I don't know Kling and I don't want to know him. It will be dark, and Rosenthal's 'll be shut up if I keep up this foolishness, and I'm going to find my mistress. If you can't find Dalton, I will, when my brother Stephen comes. Now you go your way and I'll go mine."

He waited until she had boarded a car, then wheeled quickly and dashed up Third Avenue, crossing 26th

Street at an angle, forging along toward Kling's. He was through with the old woman. She was English, and so was Dalton, and so, for that matter, was a man who, Blobbs had told him, had "blown in" at Kling's about a year ago from nobody knew where. They'd all help one another—these English. No, he'd go alone.

When he reached Otto's window he slowed down, pulled himself together, and strolled into the store with the air of a man who wanted some one to help him make up his mind what to buy. The holiday crowd had thinned for a moment, and only a few men and women were wandering about the store examining the several articles. Otto at the moment was in tow of a stout lady in furs, who had changed her mind half a dozen times in the hour and would change it again, Otto thought, when, as she said, she would "return with her husband."

"Vich she von't do," he chuckled, addressing his remark to the newcomer, "and I bet you she never come back. Dot's de funny ting about some vimmins ven dey vant to talk it over vid her husbands, and de men ven dey vant to see der vives. Den you might as vell lock up de shop—ain't dot so? Vat is it you vant—one of dem tables? Dot is a Chippendale—you can see de legs and de top."

"Yes, I see 'em," replied the detective, scanning the circumference of Otto's fat body. "But I'm not buying any tables to-day, I'm on another lead—that is, if I've got it right and your name is Kling."

"Yes, you got it right," answered Otto; "dot's my name. Vat is it you vant?"

"And you own this store?"

"And I own dis store. Didn't you see de sign ven you come in?" The man's manner and cock-sure air were beginning to nettle him.

"I might, and then again, I mightn't," Pickert retorted, relaxing into his usual swaggering tone. "I'm not looking for signs. I'm looking for a piece of lace, a mantilla they call it, that disappeared a few days ago from Rosenthal's up here on Third Avenue—a kind of shawl with a frill around it—and I thought you might have run across it."

Otto looked at him over the tops of his glasses, his anger increasing as he noticed the man's scowl of suspicion. "Oh, dot's it, is it? Dot's vat you come for. You tink I am a fence, eh?"

The detective grinned derisively. "You bought a piece of lace, didn't you?"

"I buy a dozen pieces maybe—vot's dot your business?"

"My business will come later. What I want to know is whether you've got a piece with a hole in it—black, soft, and squashy—with a frill—a flounce, they call it—and I want to tell you right here that it will be a good deal better if you keep a decent tongue in your head and stop puttin' on lugs. It's business with me."

Masie had crept up and stood listening, wondering at the stranger's rough way of talking. So had the tramp, whom Kitty had loaned to Otto for a few hours

to help move some of the heavier furniture. He seemed to be especially interested in what was taking place, for he kept edging up the closer, dusting the Colonial sideboard close to which Kling and the man were standing, his ears stretched to their utmost, in order to miss no word of the interview.

"Vell, if it's business, and you don't mean noddin, dot's anudder ting," replied Kling, in a milder tone, "maybe den I tell you. Run avay, Masie, I got someting private to say. Dot's right. You go talk to Mrs. Gossburger— Yes," he added, as the child disappeared, "I did buy a big lace shawl like dot."

Pickert's grin covered half his face. He could get along now without a search-warrant. "And have you got it now?"

"Yes, I got it now."

The grin broadened—the triumphant grin of a boy when he hears the click of a trap and knows the quarry is inside.

"Can I see it?"

"No, you can't see it." The man's cool persistency again irritated him. "I buy dot for a present and I— Look here vunce! Vat you come in here for an' ask dose questions? I never see you before. Dis is my busy time. Now you put yourselluf outside my place."

The detective made a step forward, turned his back on the rest of the shop, unbuttoned his outer coat, lifted the lapel of the inner one, and uncovered his shield.

"Come across," he said, in low, cutting tones, "and

don't get gay. I'm not after you—but you gotter help, see! I've traced this mantilla down to this shop. Now cough it up! If you've bought it on the level, I've got a roll here will square it up with you."

Otto gave a muffled whistle. "Den dot fellow vas a tief, vas he? He didn't look like it, for sure. Vell—vell—vell—dot's funny! Vy, I vouldn't have tought dot. Look like a quiet man, and——"

"You remember the man, then?" interrupted the detective, following up his advantage, and again scraping his chin with his forefinger.

"Oh, yes. I don't forgot him. Vore a buttoned-up coat—high like up to his chin——"

"And a slouch-hat?" prompted Pickert.

"Yes, vun of dose soft hats, for I tink de light hurt his eyes ven he come close up to my desk ven I gif him de money."

"And had a sort of a catch-look, a kind of a slant in his eye, didn't he?" supplemented Pickert; "and was smooth-shaven and—on the whole—rather decent-looking chap, just getting on his uppers and not quite. Ain't that it?"

"Yes, maybe, I don't recklemember everyting about him. Vell—vell—ain't dot funny? But he vasn't a dead beat—no, I don't tink so. An' he stole it? You vud never tink dot to see him. I got it in my little office, behind dot partition, in a drawer. You come along. To-morrow is New Year's"—here he glanced up the stairs to be sure that Masie was out of hearing—"and I bought dat lace for a present for

my little girl vat you saw joost now—she loves dem old tings. She has got more as a vardrobe full of dem. Vait till I untie it. Look! Ain't dot a good vun? And all I pay for it vas tventy tollars."

The detective loosened the folds, shook out the flounce, held it up to the light, and ran his thumb through the tear in the mesh.

"Of course dere's a hole—I buy him cheaper for dot hole—my little Beesving like it better for dot. If it vas new she vouldn't have it."

Pickert was now caressing the soft lace, his satisfaction complete. "A dead give-away," he said at last. "Much obliged. I'll take it along," and he began rolling it up.

"You take it—*vat?*" exclaimed Otto.

"Well, of course, it's stolen goods."

Kling leaned over and caught it from his hand. "If it's stolen goods, somebody more as you must come in and tell me dot. By Jeminy, you have got a awful cheek to come in here and tell me dot! Ven I buy, I buy, and it is mine to keep. Ven I sell, I sell, and dot's nobody's business."

Pickert bit his lip. His bluff had failed. He must go about it in another way, if Rosenthal's customer, who owned the lace, was to regain possession before the New Year set in.

"Well, then, sell it to me," he snarled.

"No, I don't sell it to you. Not if you give me tventy times tventy tollars. And now you get out of here so k'vick as you can—or me and dot man over by

dot sideboard and two more down-stairs vill trow you out! I don't care a tam how big a brass ting you got on your coat. So you dake it along vid you? Vell, you have got a cheek!"

Pickert's underlip curled in contempt. He had only to step to the door and blow a whistle were a row to begin. But that would neither help him to trail the thief nor to secure the mantilla.

"Now see here, Mr. Kling," he said, fingering the lapel of Otto's coat, "I've treated you white, now you treat me white. You make me tired with your hot air, and it don't go—see, not with me!—and now I'll put it to you straight. Will you sell me that mantilla? Here's the money"—and he pulled out a roll of bills.

Otto was now thoroughly angry. "*No!*" he shouted, moving toward the door of his office.

"Will you help put me on to the man who sold it to you?"

"No!" roared Kling again, his Dutch blood at boiling-point. "I put you on noddin—dot's your bis'ness, dis puttin' on, not mine." He had walked out of the office and was beckoning to the tramp. "Here, you! You go down-stairs and tell Hans to come up k'vick—right avay."

The tramp slouched up—a sliding movement, led by his shoulder, his feet following.

"Maybe, boss, I kin help if you don't mind my crowdin' in." He had listened to the whole conversation and knew exactly what would happen if he carried

out Kling's order. He had seen too many mix-ups in his time—most of them through resisting an officer in the discharge of his duty. Kling, the first thing he knew, would be wearing a pair of handcuffs, and he himself might lose his job.

He addressed the detective: "I saw the guy when he come in and I saw him when he went out. Mr. O'Day saw him, too, but he'd skipped afore he got on to his mug. He'll tell ye same as me."

The detective canted his head, looked the tramp over from his shoes to his unkempt head, and turned suddenly to Kling. "Who's Mr. O'Day?" he snapped.

"He's my clerk," growled Otto, his determination to get rid of the man checked by this new turn in the situation.

"Can I see him?"

"No, you can't see him, because he's gone out vid Kitty Cleary. He'll be back maybe in an hour—maybe he don't come back at all. He don't know noddin about dis bis'ness and nobody don't let him know noddin about it until to-morrow. Den my little Beesving know de first. Half de fun is in de surprise."

The detective at once lost interest in Kling, and turned to the tramp again—the two moving out of Otto's hearing. A new and fresh scent had crossed the trail—one it might be wise to follow.

"You work here?" he asked. He had taken his measure in a glance and was ready to use him.

"No, I work in John Cleary's express office," grunted

the tramp. "Mr. O'Day wanted me to come over and help for New Year's."

"What's he got to do with you?"

"He got me my job."

"He's an Englishman, ain't he?"

"Yes, and the best ever."

"Oh, yes, of course," sneered the detective. "Been working here a year and knows the ropes. So you saw the man come in and O'Day, the clerk, saw him go out, did he? And O'Day sent for you to stay around in case any questions were asked? Is that it?"

The tramp's lip was lifted, showing his teeth. "No, that ain't it by a damned sight! I know who pinched the goods—knowed him for months. Know his name, just as well as I know yours. I got on to you soon as you come in."

The detective shot a quick glance at the speaker. "Me?" he returned quietly.

"Yes—*you*. Your name is Pickert—*one* of your names—you've got half a dozen. And the guy's name is Stanton. He hangs out at the Bowdoin House, and when he ain't there he's playin' pool at Steve Lipton's where I used to work. Are you on?"

The detective betrayed no surprise, neither over the mention of his own name nor that of Stanton. If the tramp's story were true he would have the bracelets on the thief before morning. He decided, however, to try the old game first.

"It may be worth something to you if you can make

good," he said, with a confidential shrug of his near shoulder.

The tramp thrust out his chin with a gesture of disgust. "Nothin' doin'! You can keep your plunks. I don't want 'em. I know you fellers—I got onto your curves when I was on my uppers. When you can't get your nippers on the right man you slip 'em on the first galoot you catch, and I want to tell you right here that you can't mix Mr. O'Day in this business, for he don't know nothin' about it, nor anything else that's crooked. I'll get this man Stanton for you if the boss will let me out for an hour. Shall I ask him?"

Pickert examined his finger-nails for a brief moment —one seemed in need of immediate repairs—his mind all the while in deep thought. The tramp might help or he might not. He evidently knew him, and it was possible that he also knew Stanton, the name borne by the woman charged with the theft; or the whole yarn might be a ruse to give the real thief a tip, and thus block everything. Lipton's place he frequented, and the Bowdoin House he could find.

"No, you stay here," he broke out. "I'll get him."

He walked back to the office, the tramp following. "I say, Mr. Kling!" he called impudently.

Otto lifted his head. He had locked up the mantilla and had the key in his pocket. For him the incident was closed.

"Vell?" replied Otto dryly.

"Does this man work over at Cleary's express?"

"He does. Vy?"

"Oh, nothing. I may want him later. And, say!"

"Vell," again replied Otto.

"Git wise and surprise that little girl of yours with something else—she'll never wear that mantilla. So long," and he strode out of the store.

CHAPTER XXIII

The short winter's day had run its course and a soft, aimless snow was falling—each flake a lazy feather, careless of its fate. The store windows were ablaze, and many of the houses on both sides of "The Avenue" were alive with newly kindled gas-jets, the street-lamps shedding their light over a broad highway blocked with slipping teams, their carts crammed to the utmost with holiday freight.

A spirit of good-fellowship and unrestrained joyousness was everywhere. When a team was stalled, two or three men put their shoulders to the wheels; when a horse slipped and fell, a dozen others helped him to his feet. Snowballs, thrown in good humor and received with a laugh, filled the air. New York was getting ready to celebrate the night before New Year's, the maddest night of all the year in old Manhattan, when groups of merrymakers, carrying tin horns and jingling cow-bells, crowd the sidewalks, singing and shouting, forming flying wedges, swooping down on other wedges—strangers all—the whole ending in roars of laughter and "Happy New Year's," repeated again and again until the next collision.

None of this roused Felix as, with heavy heart, he turned into Kitty's. Of what the morrow would

bring forth he dared not think. Father Cruse, he knew, would do what he could to save Barbara, and the British consul—a man he had always avoided—might help. But nothing of all this could lighten his load or relieve his pain. She might be given her freedom for a time, or she might be turned over to one of the reformatories for a term of years—either course meant untold suffering to a woman reared as his wife had been. These mental tortures of the day had burned their way into his brain, as branding-irons burn into flesh, the agony seaming the lines of his face and deep-hollowing the eyes, forming scars that might take years to efface.

As his fingers gripped the knob of Kitty's outside office, shouts of "Happy New Year" rang out from a group of girls showering each other with snowballs.

"Pray God," he said to himself, "that it be better than the one which is passing," and stepped inside, to find Kitty in the kitchen.

"I have come to talk to you," he said, speaking as a man whose strength is far spent. "And if you do not mind, I will ask you to go into the sitting-room where we shall not be disturbed. I have something to say to you. Will you be alone?"

Kitty gave a start. She knew at once that some new development had brought him to her at this hour.

"Yes, not a soul but me. John and Bobby are up to the Grand Central, Mike's bailed out, and yer tramp just come over from Otto's. They're cleanin' out the stables. Is it some news ye have of her?"

"No—nothing more than you know. That must wait until to-morrow. Nothing can be done to-night."

She followed him into the room, dragged out a chair from against the wall, waited until he had slipped off his mackintosh, and then seated herself beside him.

"No," he repeated, passing his hand across his eyes as if to shut out some haunting vision. "There is no news. She is in a cell, I suppose. My God, what does it all mean!"

He paused, his head averted, staring straight ahead.

"You have been very kind to me, Mrs. Cleary, since I have been here—you and your husband. You may not have realized it, but I do not think I could have gone through the year without you—you and little Masie. I have come to the end now, where no one can help. I have tried to carry it through alone. I did not want to burden you with my troubles and—if I could prevent it, I would not now, but you will know it sooner or later, and I would rather tell you myself than have you hear it from strangers."

He hesitated for an instant, looked into her eyes, and said slowly: "The woman you picked up in the street and who is now in prison, is my wife, or was, until a year ago."

Kitty neither moved nor spoke. The announcement did not greatly surprise her. What absorbed her was the new, hard lines in his face, her wonder being that such suffering should have fallen upon the head of a man who so little deserved it.

"And is that what has been breakin' yer heart all these months ye lived with us?"

Felix moved uneasily. "Yes. There has been nothing else."

"And she's the same one ye've been a-trampin' the streets to find?"

Felix bowed his head in assent.

"And ye kep' all this from me?" she asked, as a mother might reproach her son.

"You could have done nothing."

"I could have comforted ye. That would have been somethin'. Did she leave ye?"

Again Felix bowed his head in answer. The spoken words would only add to his pain.

"For another man, was it?—Yes, I see—you twice her age, and she a chit of a child. Ye can't do much for that kind once they get their heads set—no matter how good ye are to them. And I suppose that when I found her that night on the door-steps and brought her into the kitchen, he'd turned her into the street. That's it, isn't it? And then she got to stealin' to keep from starvin'?"

"Yes, I suppose so—I do not know. I only know she is a criminal. That is shame enough."

"And is that all ye came to tell me?" She was going to the bottom of it now. This man was gripped in the tortures of the damned and could only be helped when he had emptied out his heart—all of it, down to the very dregs.

"No, there is something else. I wanted to speak to

you about Masie. I may go back to England in a few days and I am not satisfied to leave her unprotected. She has no mother and you have no daughter—would you look after her for me? I have learned to love her very dearly—and I am greatly disturbed over her future and who is to look after her. Her father will not listen to any plans I might make for her, nor will he take proper care of her. He thinks he does, but he lets her do as she pleases. She will be a woman in a very short time, and I shudder when I think of the dangers which beset her. A shop like Kling's is no place for a child like Masie."

Kitty had turned pale when Felix announced his probable departure, something to which she had not yet given a thought, but she heard him to the end.

"I will do all I can for Masie, but that can wait. And now I'm goin' to talk to ye as if ye were my John, and ye got to be patient with me, Mr. O'Day. God knows I'd help ye in any way I could, but ye've got to help me a little so I can help ye the better. May I go on?"

"Help! How can I help?" he asked listlessly.

"By trustin' me—and I can be trusted, and so can John. I found out some months ago that ye were Sir Felix O'Day, but ye never heard me blab it to any livin' soul, nor did John either—not even to Father Cruse. I've watched ye go in and out all these months, and many a night, tired as I was, I didn't get to sleep, worryin' about ye until I'd heard ye shut yer door. Ye said nothin' to me and I could say nothin' to ye.

I knew ye'd tell me when the time come and it has, with ye nigh crazy, and she on her way to Sing Sing. What she's been through since that night I brought her here, I don't know—but she'd 'a' broke your heart if ye'd seen her staggerin' weak, followin' me and John like a whipped dog. I thought then she had got the worst of it, somehow, and that she hadn't deserved what had been handed out to her, and John thought so, too. What it was I didn't know, but I've got somebody now who does know and who will tell me the truth, and I'm askin' ye to give it to me straight. If she was your wife she must be a lady, for ye wouldn't 'a' married anybody else. And if she was a lady, how has it happened that she is locked up in the Tombs, and that a gentleman like ye is working at Otto's? And before ye answer, remember that I'm not askin' for meself, but for you and the poor woman ye tried to find to-day."

His tired eyes had not left her own during the long outburst. He had never doubted her sincerity nor her kindliness, but now, as he listened, there stole over him a yearning, strange in one so habitually reticent, to share with her the secret he had hidden all these months—except from Father Cruse.

"Yes, you shall know," he answered, with a sigh of relief. "It is best that somebody should know, and best of all that it should be you. But first tell me how you found out that I could use my father's title—I have never told anybody here."

"An Englishman told me, who wanted his trunk

taken to the steamer. He saw you cross the street. 'That's Sir Felix O'Day,' he said, 'and he has had more trouble than any man I ever knew.'"

"Did you check the trunk?"

"Yes."

"That explains how my solicitor in London, whom I have just heard from, discovered my address. He mentioned a trunk-tag as his clew; he and the Englishman evidently met. As to the title, it was of no use to me here. I may use it now, at home, for he writes that there were several hundreds of pounds sterling saved out of my own and my father's wreck, together with a small cottage and a few acres of land near London. Had I known it, however, before I came here, it would have made no difference, nor would it have altered my plan. I had come here to find my wife, for I knew that sooner or later she would be utterly stranded, without a human being to whom she could appeal; but I never expected to find her a criminal. Terrible! Terrible! I cannot yet take it in. Poor child! What is to become of her, God only knows!"

He had risen, and in his agony walked to the window, his updrawn shoulders tense, like those of a man standing by an open grave. He stood there for a moment, Kitty silently watching him, until, with a deep sigh, he came back to his chair.

"I have been a fool, no doubt, to pursue this thing as I have, but there seemed no other way. I could not have lived with myself afterward, if I had not made the effort. I knew that you and your husband

often wondered at the life I led, and I have often thanked you in my heart for your loyalty. It is but another one of the things that have made this home so dear to me. I told Father Cruse what brought me to New York, so that he could help me find her, and he has been more than kind. Many a night we have tramped the streets together, or have searched haunts that either she, or the man who ruined her, might frequent, or where we should meet persons who had seen them, but so far, you are the only person who has brought us near to each other.

"I tell you now because it is better that you and I should understand each other before I sail, and because, too, you are a big, brave, true-hearted woman who can and will understand. You may not think it, but you have been a revelation to me, Mrs. Cleary—you and this home—and the neighborhood, in fact, peopled with clean, wholesome men and women. It has been a great lesson to me and a marvellous contrast to what had surrounded me at home. You were right in your surmise that my wife is a lady, and that I have been born a gentleman. And now I will tell you why we are both here."

Then, in broken words, with long pauses between, he told her the story of his own and Lady Barbara's home life, and of Dalton's perfidy with all the horror that had followed, Kitty's body bent forward, her ears drinking in every word, her plump, ruddy hands resting in her lap, her heart throbbing with sympathy for the man who sat there so calm and patient, stating his

case without bitterness, his anger only rising when he recounted the incidents leading up to his wife's estrangement and denounced the man who had planned her ruin.

Only when the tale was ended did she burst out: "And I ain't surprised yer heart's broke! Ye've had enough to kill ye. The wonder to me is that ye're walkin' around with yer head up and your heart not soured. I been thinkin' and thinkin' all these months, and John and I have talked it over many a night; but we never thought it was as bad as it is. And now I'm goin' to ask ye a question and ye must tell me the truth. What are ye goin' to do next?"

"See Father Cruse to-night and tell him what I have found out. He must do the rest. I have gone as far as I dared, and can go no further. I must draw the line at crime. In spite of it all, I would have gone down-stairs to see her, had she not been sent away, but I am glad now that I did not. She comes of a proud race and that would have been the last thing she could have borne. As it is, she thinks I am in Australia, and it's better that she should. She would have thought I had come to taunt her, and no one could have undeceived her. I know her—and her wilfulness. Poor child! She has always been her own worst enemy. And so, just as soon as I learn what is to happen to her, I shall settle my account with the man who has caused her ruin, and return to England—and I can go the easier, and pick up my old life again the better, if I can be assured that you will look after little Masie, and see that no harm comes to her."

Kitty raised her hands from her lap and folded them across her bosom. "Let me talk a little, will ye, Mr. O'Day? Ye needn't worry about Masie. I'll take care of her—all that Kling will let me. I knew her mother, who died when the child was born, and a fine woman she was—ten times as good as Kling whom her father made her marry. But there's somebody else who needs me, and who needs ye more than Masie needs us, and that's yer wife. How do ye know her heart is not breakin' for somebody to say a kind word to her? Are ye goin' home and leave her like this? That's not like ye, and I don't want to hear ye say it. Do you mean that if she is put away up the river, ye won't stay here and——"

"What for, to sit for five years waiting for her to come out? And what then? Have you ever seen one reform?"

"And if she gets off, and wanders around the streets?"

"Father Cruse must answer that question."

"But ye came all these miles to New York to pull her out of the mess she had got into with that man who's ruined yer home, and ye out in the cold without a cent—and ye forgave her for that—and now that she's locked up with only herself to suffer, ye turn yer back on her and leave her to fight it out alone."

"I did not forgive *her*, Mrs. Cleary," he said in deliberate tones. "I forgave her childish nature, remembering the way she had been educated; remembering, too, that I was twice her age. Nor did I forget the poverty I had brought upon her."

"And why not forgive her this?" She could hardly restrain a sob as she spoke.

His lips straightened and his brows narrowed. "This is not due to her nature," he answered coldly, "nor to her bringing up. She has now committed a crime and is beyond reclaim. Once a thief, always a thief. I must stop somewhere."

"But why not hear her story from her own lips?" she pleaded, her voice choking. "*You* hear it—not Father Cruse, nor me, nor anybody but YOU, who have loved her!"

Felix shook his head. "It is kinder for me to stay away. The very sight of me would kill her." His answer was final.

Kitty squared herself. "I don't believe it," she cried, the tears now coursing down her cheeks. "Oh, for the blessed God's sake don't say it—take it back! Listen to me, Mr. O'Day. If she ever wanted a friend it's now. I'd go meself but I'd do no good—nor nothin' I'd tell her would do her any good. It's a man she wants to lean on, not a woman. I can almost lift my John off his feet with one hand, but when I get into trouble I'm just so much putty, runnin' to him like a baby, weak as a rag, and he pattin' my cheek same as if I was a three-year-old. Go and get yer arms around her and tell her ye don't believe a word of it, and that ye'll stand by her to the end, and ye'll make a good woman of her. Turn yer back on her, and they'll have her in potter's field if she gets out of this scrape, for she can't fight long—she hasn't got the strength.

"She could hardly get up-stairs the night I put her to bed—she was that tremblin', and she's no better to-day. Don't let yer pride shut up yer heart, Mr. O'Day. You are a gentleman and ye've lived like one, and ye've got your own and yer father's name to keep clean, and that poor child has dragged it in the mud, and the papers will be full of it, and the disgrace of it all dries ye up, and ye can go no further, and so ye cut loose and let her sink. No, don't ye get angry with me—if ye were my own John I'd tell ye the same. Listen—do ye hear them horns blowin' and the children shoutin'? It's New Year's Eve—to-morrow all the slates will be wiped clean—the past rubbed out and everybody'll have a new start. Make a clean slate of yer own heart—wipe out everything ye've got against that poor child. Take her in yer arms once more—help her come back! If God didn't clean His own slate once in a while and forgive us, none of us would ever get to heaven. Hush! Quiet now! Somebody's just come into the office. I'll not let any one in to disturb ye. Stay where ye are till I see. I hear a voice. *What!* Well, as I'm alive, it's Father Cruse—what's he come for at this hour? Shall I let him in?"

Felix lifted himself slowly to his feet, as would a man in a hospital ward who sees the doctor approaching.

"Yes, let him in; I was going to look him up." He was relieved at the interruption. Kitty's appeal had deeply stirred him, but had not swerved him from his purpose. He had done his duty—all of it, to the very

last. The day's developments had ended everything. He had no right to bring a criminal into his family.

Kitty swung wide the door and Father Cruse stepped in. He wore his heavy cassock, which was flecked with snow, and his wide hat.

"My messenger told me you were here, Mr. O'Day," he cried out, in a cheery voice, "and I came at once. And, Mrs. Cleary, I am more than glad to find you here as well."

Felix stepped forward. "It was very good of you, Father. I was coming down to see you in a few minutes." They had shaken hands and the three stood together.

The priest glanced in question at Kitty, then back again at Felix. "Does Mrs. Cleary——"

"Yes, Mrs. Cleary knows," returned Felix calmly. "I have told her everything. Lady Barbara—" he paused, the words were strangling him, "has been arrested—for stealing—and is now in the Tombs prison."

Father Cruse laid his hand on O'Day's shoulder. "No, my friend, she is not in the Tombs. I took her to St. Barnabas's Home and put her in charge of the Sisters."

Felix straightened his back. "You have saved her from it."

"Yes, two hours ago. And she can stay there until the matter is settled, or just as long as you wish it." His hand was still on O'Day's shoulder, his mind intent on the drawn features, seamed with the furrows the last few hours had ploughed. He saw how he had suffered.

Felix stretched out his hand as if to steady himself, motioned the priest to a chair, and sank into his own.

"In the Sisters' Home," he repeated mechanically, after a moment's silence. Then rousing himself: "And you will see her, Father, from time to time?"

"Yes, every day. Why do you ask such a question—of me, in particular?"

"Because," replied Felix slowly, "I may be away—out of the country. I have just asked Mrs. Cleary to look after Masie and she has promised she will. And I am going to ask you to look after my poor wife. They must be very gentle with her—and they should not judge her too harshly." He seemed to be talking at random, thinking aloud rather than addressing his companions. "Since I saw you I have received a letter from my solicitor. There is some money coming to me, he says, and I shall see that she is not a burden to you."

The priest turned abruptly, and laid a firm hand on O'Day's knee. "But you will see her, of course?"

"No, it is better that you act for me. She will not want to see me in her present condition."

Kitty was about to protest, when Father Cruse waved her into silence. "You certainly cannot mean what you have just said, Mr. O'Day?"

"I do."

The priest rose quickly, passed through the kitchen, and opened the door leading to the outer office. Two women stood waiting, one in a long cloak, the other

clinging to her arm, her face white as chalk, her lips quivering.

"Come in," said the priest.

Martha put her arm around Lady Barbara and led her into the room.

Felix staggered to his feet.

The two stood facing each other, Lady Barbara searching his eyes, her fingers tight hold of Martha's arm.

"Don't turn away, Felix," she sobbed. "Please listen. Father Cruse said you would. He brought me here."

No answer came, nor did he move, nor had he heard her plea. It was the bent, wasted figure and sunken cheeks, the strands of her still beautiful hair in a coil about her neck, that absorbed him.

Again her eyes crept up to his.

"I'm so tired, Felix—so tired. Won't you please take me home to my father——"

He made a step forward, halted as if to recover his balance, wavered again, and stretched out his hands.

"Barbara! *Barbara!*" he cried. "Your home is here." And he caught her in his arms.

END

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